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THE PURPLE LAND; GREEN MANSIONS; EL OMBÚ

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CHAPTER I

RAMBLES IN MODERN TROY

THREE chapters in the story of my life—three periods, distinct and well defined, yet consecutive—beginning when I had not completed twenty-five years and finishing before thirty, will probably prove the most eventful of all. To the very end they will come back oftenest to memory and seem more vivid than all the other years of existence—the four-and-twenty I had already lived, and the, say, forty or forty-five—I hope it may be fifty or even sixty—which are to follow. For what soul in this wonderful various world would wish to depart before ninety! The dark as well as the light, its sweet and its bitter, make me love it.

Of the first of these three a word only need be written. This was the period of courtship and matrimony; and though the experience seemed to me then something altogether new and strange in the world, it must nevertheless have resembled that of other men, since all men marry. And the last period, which was the longest of the three,

occupying fully three years, could not be told. It was all black disaster. Three years of enforced separation and the extremest suffering which the cruel law of the land allowed an enraged father to inflict on his child and the man who had ventured to wed her against his will. Even the wise may be driven mad by oppression, and I that was never wise, but lived in and was led by the passions and illusions and the unbounded self-confidence of youth, what must it have been for me when we were cruelly torn asunder; when I was cast into prison to lie for long months in the company of felons, ever thinking of her who was also desolate and breaking her heart! But it is ended—the abhorred restraint, the anxiety, the broodings over a thousand possible and impossible schemes of revenge. If it is any consolation to know that in breaking her heart he, at the same time, broke his own and made haste to join her in that silent place, I have it. Ah no! it is no comfort to me, since I cannot but reflect that before he shattered my life I had shattered his by taking her from him, who was his idol. We are quits then, and I can even say, "Peace to his ashes!" But I could not say it then in my frenzy and grief, nor could it be said in that fatal country which I had inhabited from boyhood and had learned to love like my own, and had hoped never to leave. It was grown hateful to me, and, flying from it, I found myself once more in that Purple Land where we had formerly taken refuge together, and which now seemed to my distracted mind a place of pleasant and peaceful memories.

During the months of quietude after the storm, mostly

spent in lonely rambles by the shore, these memories were more and more with me. Sometimes sitting on the summit of that great solitary hill, which gives the town its name, I would gaze by the hour on the wide prospect towards the interior, as if I could see and never weary of seeing all that lay beyond—plains and rivers and woods and hills, and cabins where I had rested, and many a kindly human face. Even the faces of those who had ill-treated or regarded me with evil eyes now appeared to have a friendly look. Most of all did I think of that dear river, the unforgettable Yí, the shaded white house at the end of the little town, and the sad and beautiful image of one whom I, alas! had made unhappy.

So much was I occupied towards the end of that vacant period with these recollections that I remembered how, before quitting these shores, the thought had come to me that during some quiet interval in my life I would go over it all again, and write the history of my rambles for others to read in the future. But I did not attempt it then, nor until long years afterwards. For I had no sooner begun to play with the idea than something came to rouse me from the state I was in, during which I had been like one that has outlived his activities, and is no longer capable of a new emotion, but feeds wholly on the past. And this something new, affecting me so that I was all at once myself again, eager to be up and doing, was nothing more than a casual word from a distance, the cry of a lonely heart, which came by chance to my ear; and hearing it I was like one who opening his eyes from a troubled doze unexpectedly sees the morning star in its

unearthly lustre above the wide, dark plain where night overtook him—the star of day and everlasting hope, and of passion and strife and toil and rest and happiness.

I need not linger on the events which took us to the Banda—our nocturnal flight from Paquita's summer home on the pampas; the hiding and clandestine marriage in the capital and subsequent escape northwards into the province of Santa Fé; the seven to eight months of somewhat troubled happiness we had there; and finally, the secret return to Buenos Ayres in search of a ship to take us out of the country. Troubled happiness! Ah yes, and my greatest trouble was when I looked on her, my partner for life, when she seemed loveliest, so small, so exquisite in her dark blue eyes that were like violets, and silky black hair and tender pink and olive complexion—so frail in appearance! And I had taken her—stolen her—from her natural protectors, from the home where she had been worshipped—I of an alien race and another religion, without means, and, because I had stolen her, an offender against the law. But of this no more. I begin my itinerary where, safe on our little ship, with the towers of Buenos Ayres fast fading away in the west, we began to feel free from apprehension and to give ourselves up to the contemplation of the delights before us. Winds and waves presently interfered with our raptures, Paquita proving a very indifferent sailor, so that for some hours we had a very trying time of it. Next day a favourable north-west breeze sprang up to send us flying like a bird over those unlovely red billows, and in the evening we disembarked in Montevideo, the city of refuge.

We proceeded to an hotel, where for several days we lived very happily, enchanted with each other's society; and when we strolled along the beach to watch the setting sun, kindling with mystic fire heaven, water, and the great hill that gives the city its name, and remembered that we were looking towards the shores of Buenos Ayres, it was pleasant to reflect that the widest river in the world rolled between us and those who probably felt offended at what we had done.

This charming state of things came to an end at length in a somewhat curious manner. One night, before we had been a month in the hotel, I was lying wide awake in bed. It was late; I had already heard the mournful, long-drawn voice of the watchman under my window calling out, "Half-past one and cloudy."

Gil Blas relates in his biography that one night while lying awake he fell into practising a little introspection, an unusual thing for him to do, and the conclusion he came to was that he was not a very good young man. I was having a somewhat similar experience that night when, in the midst of my unflattering thoughts about myself, a profound sigh from Paquíta made me aware that she too was lying wide awake and also, in all probability, chewing the cud of reflection. When I questioned her concerning that sigh, she endeavoured in vain to conceal from me that she was beginning to feel unhappy. What a rude shock the discovery gave me! And we so lately married! It is only just to Paquíta, however, to say that had I not married her she would have been still more unhappy. Only the poor child could not help

thinking of father and mother; she yearned for reconciliation, and her present sorrow rose from her belief that they would never, never, never forgive her. I endeavoured, with all the eloquence I was capable of, to dispel these gloomy ideas, but she was firm in her conviction that precisely because they had loved her so much they would never pardon this first great offence. My poor darling might have been reading "Christabel," I thought, when she said that it is toward those who have been most deeply loved the wounded heart cherishes the greatest bitterness. Then, by way of illustration, she told me of a quarrel between her mother and a till then dearly loved sister. It had happened many years ago, when she, Paquita, was a mere child; yet the sisters had never forgiven each other.

"And where," I asked, "is this aunt of yours, of whom I have never heard you speak until this minute?"

"Oh," answered Paquita, with the greatest simplicity imaginable, "she left this country long, long ago, and you never heard of her because we were not even allowed to mention her name in the house. She went to live in Montevideo, and I believe she is there still, for several years ago I heard some person say that she had bought herself a house in that city."

"Soul of my life," said I, "you have never left Buenos Ayres in heart, even to keep your poor husband company! Yet I know, Paquita, that corporeally you are here in Montevideo conversing with me at this very moment."

"True," said Paquita; "I had somehow forgotten that we were in Montevideo. My thoughts were wandering—perhaps it is sleepiness."

"I swear to you, Paquíta," I replied, "that you shall see this aunt of yours to-morrow before set of sun; and I am positive, sweetest, that she will be delighted to receive so near and lovely a relation. How glad she will be of an opportunity of relating that ancient quarrel with her sister and ventilating her mouldy grievances! I know these old dames—they are all alike."

Paquíta did not like the idea at first, but when I assured her that we were getting to the end of our money, and that her aunt might be able to put me in the way of obtaining employment, she consented, like the dutiful little wife she was.

Next day I discovered her relation without very much trouble, Montevideo not being a large city. We found Doña Isidora—for that was the lady's name—living in a somewhat mean-looking house at the eastern extremity of the town, furthest away from the water. There was an air of poverty about the place, for the good dame, though well provided with means to live comfortably, made a pet of her gold. Nevertheless, she received us very kindly when we introduced ourselves and related our mournful and romantic story; a room was prepared for our immediate reception, and she even made me some vague promises of assistance. On a more intimate acquaintance with our hostess we found that I had not been very far out in guessing her character. For several days she could talk of nothing except her immemorial quarrel with her sister and her sister's husband, and we were bound to listen attentively and to sympathise with her, for that was the only return we could make for her hospitality.

Paquíta had more than her share of it, but was made no wiser as to the cause of this feud of long standing; for, though Doña Isidora had evidently been nursing her wrath all those years to keep it warm, she could not, for the life of her, remember how the quarrel originated.

After breakfast each morning I would kiss her and hand her over to the tender mercies of her Isidora, then go forth on my fruitless perambulations about the town. At first I only acted the intelligent foreigner, going about staring at the public buildings, and collecting curios—strangely marked pebbles, and a few military brass buttons, long shed by the garments they once made brave; rusty misshapen bullets, mementoes of the immortal nine or ten years' siege which had won for Montevideo the mournful appellation of modern Troy. When I had fully examined from the outside the scene of my future triumphs—for I had now resolved to settle down and make my fortune in Montevideo—I began seriously to look out for employment. I visited in turn every large mercantile establishment in the place, and, in fact, every house where I thought there might be a chance of lighting on something to do. It was necessary to make a beginning, and I would not have turned up my nose at anything, however small, I was so heartily sick of being poor, idle, and dependent. Nothing could I find. In one house I was told that the city had not yet recovered from the effects of the late revolution, and that business was, in consequence, in a complete state of paralysis; in another that the city was on the eve of a revolution, and that business was, in consequence, in a complete state of

paralysis. And everywhere it was the same story—the political state of the country made it impossible for me to win an honest dollar.

Feeling very much dispirited, and with the soles nearly worn off my boots, I sat down on a bench beside the sea, or river—for some call it one thing, some the other, and the muddied hue and freshness of the water, and the uncertain words of geographers, leave one in doubt as to whether Montevideo is situated on the shores of the Atlantic, or only near the Atlantic and on the shores of a river one hundred and fifty miles wide at its mouth. I did not trouble my head about it; I had other things that concerned me more nearly to think of. I had a quarrel with this Oriental nation, and that was more to me than the greenness or the saltness of the vast estuary that washes the dirty feet of its queen—for this modern Troy, this city of battle, murder, and sudden death, also calls itself Queen of the Plata. That it was a very just quarrel on my part I felt well assured. Now, to be even with every human being who despitefully uses me has ever been a principle of action with me. Nor let it be said that it is an unchristian principle; for when I have been smitten on the right or left cheek (the pain is just the same in either case), before I am prepared to deliver the return blow so long a time has often elapsed that all wrathful or revengeful thoughts are over. I strike in such a case more for the public good than for my own satisfaction, and am therefore right in calling my motive a principle of action, not an impulse. It is a very valuable one too, infinitely more effective than the fantastical

code of the duellist, which favours the person who inflicts the injury, affording him facilities for murdering or maiming the person injured. It is a weapon invented for us by Nature before Colonel Colt ever lived, and it has this advantage, that one is permitted to wear it in the most law-abiding communities as well as amongst miners and backwoodsmen. If inoffensive people were ever to cast it aside, then wicked men would have everything their own way and make life intolerable. Fortunately the evil-doers always have the fear of this intangible six-shooter before them; a wholesome feeling, which restrains them more than reasonableness or the law courts, and to which we owe it that the meek are permitted to inherit the earth. But now this quarrel was with a whole nation, though certainly not with a very great one, since the population of the Banda Oriental numbers only about a quarter of a million. Yet in this sparsely settled country, with its bountiful soil and genial climate, there was apparently no place for me, a muscular and fairly intelligent young man, who only asked to be allowed to work to live! But how was I to make them smart for this injustice? I could not take the scorpion they gave me when I asked them for an egg, and make it sting every individual composing the nation. I was powerless, utterly powerless, to punish them, and therefore the only thing that remained for me to do was to curse them.

Looking around me, my eyes rested on the famous hill across the bay, and I all at once resolved to go up to its summit, and, looking down on the Banda Oriental, pro-

nounce my imprecation in the most solemn and impressive manner.

The expedition to the *cerro*, as it is called, proved agreeable enough. Notwithstanding the excessive heats we were just then having, many wild flowers were blooming on its slopes, which made it a perfect garden. When I reached the old ruined fort which crowns the summit, I got upon a wall and rested for half an hour, fanned by a fresh breeze from the river and greatly enjoying the prospect before me. I had not left out of sight the serious object of my visit to that commanding spot, and only wished that the malediction I was about to utter could be rolled down in the shape of a stupendous rock, loosed from its hold, which would go bounding down the mountain, and, leaping clear over the bay, crash through the iniquitous city beyond, filling it with ruin and amazement.

"Whichever way I turn," I said, "I see before me one of the fairest habitations God has made for man: great plains smiling with everlasting spring; ancient woods; swift beautiful rivers; ranges of blue hills stretching away to the dim horizon. And beyond those fair slopes, how many leagues of pleasant wilderness are sleeping in the sunshine, where the wild flowers waste their sweetness and no plough turns the fruitful soil, where deer and ostrich roam fearless of the hunter, while over all bends a blue sky without a cloud to stain its exquisite beauty? And the people dwelling in yon city—the key to a continent—they are the possessors of it all. It is theirs, since the world, out of which the old spirit is fast dying, has

suffered them to keep it. What have they done with this their heritage? What are they doing even now? They are sitting dejected in their houses, or standing in their doorways with folded arms and anxious, expectant faces. For a change is coming: they are on the eve of a tempest. Not an atmospheric change; no blighting simoom will sweep over their fields, nor will any volcanic eruption darken their crystal heavens. The earthquakes that shake the Andean cities to their foundations they have never known and can never know. The expected change and tempest is a political one. The plot is ripe, the daggers sharpened, the contingent of assassins hired, the throne of human skulls, styled in their ghastly facetiousness a Presidential Chair, is about to be assaulted. It is long, weeks or even months, perhaps, since the last wave, crested with bloody froth, rolled its desolating flood over the country; it is high time, therefore, for all men to prepare themselves for the shock of the succeeding wave. And we consider it right to root up thorns and thistles, to drain malarious marshes, to extirpate rats and vipers; but it would be immoral, I suppose, to stamp out these people because their vicious natures are disguised in human shape; this people that in crimes have surpassed all others, ancient or modern, until because of them the name of a whole continent has grown to be a byword of scorn and reproach throughout the earth, and to stink in the nostrils of all men!

"I swear that I, too, will become a conspirator if I remain long on this soil. Oh, for a thousand young men of Devon and Somerset here with me, every one of them

with a brain on fire with thoughts like mine! What a glorious deed would be done for humanity! What a mighty cheer we would raise for the glory of the old England that is passing away! Blood would flow in yon streets as it never flowed before, or, I should say, as it only flowed in them once, and that was when they were swept clean by British bayonets. And afterwards there would be peace, and the grass would be greener and the flowers brighter for that crimson shower.

"Is it not then bitter as wormwood and gall to think that over these domes and towers beneath my feet, no longer than half a century ago, fluttered the holy cross of St. George! For never was there a holier crusade undertaken, never a nobler conquest planned, than that which had for its object the wresting this fair country from unworthy hands, to make it for all time part of the mighty English kingdom. What would it have been now —this bright, winterless land, and this city commanding the entrance to the greatest river in the world? And to think that it was won for England, not treacherously, or bought with gold, but in the old Saxon fashion with hard blows, and climbing over heaps of slain defenders; and after it was thus won, to think that it was lost—will it be believed?—not fighting, but yielded up without a stroke by craven wretches unworthy of the name of Britons! Here, sitting alone on this mountain, my face burns like fire when I think of it—this glorious opportunity lost for ever! 'We offer you your laws, your religion, and property under the protection of the British Government,' loftily proclaimed the invaders—Generals Beresford,

Achmuty, Whitelocke, and their companions; and presently, after suffering one reverse, they (or one of them) lost heart and exchanged the country they had drenched in blood, and had conquered, for a couple of thousand British soldiers made prisoners in Buenos Ayres across the water; then, getting into their ships once more, they sailed away from the Plata for ever! This transaction, which must have made the bones of our Viking ancestors rattle with indignation in their graves, was forgotten later on when we seized the rich Falklands. A splendid conquest and a glorious compensation for our loss! When yon queen city was in our grasp, and the regeneration, possibly even the ultimate possession, of this green world before us, our hearts failed us and the prize dropped from our trembling hands. We left the sunny mainland to capture the desolate haunt of seals and penguins; and now let all those who in this quarter of the globe aspire to live under that 'British Protection' of which Achmuty preached so loudly at the gates of yon capital, transport themselves to those lonely antarctic islands to listen to the thunder of the waves on the grey shores and shiver in the bleak winds that blow from the frozen south!"

After delivering this comminatory address I felt greatly relieved, and went home in a cheerful frame of mind to supper, which consisted that evening of mutton scrag, boiled with pumpkin, sweet potatoes, and milky maize—not at all a bad dish for a hungry man.

CHAPTER II

PEASANT HOMES AND HEARTS

SEVERAL days passed, and my second pair of boots had been twice resoled before Doña Isidora's schemes for advancing my fortunes began to take form. Perhaps she was beginning to think us a burden on her somewhat niggardly establishment; anyway, hearing that my preference was for a country life, she gave me a letter containing half a dozen lines of commendation addressed to the Mayordomo of a distant cattle-breeding establishment, asking him to serve the writer by giving her *nephew*—as she called me—employment of some kind on the estancia. Probably she knew that this letter would really lead to nothing, and gave it merely to get me away into the interior of the country, so as to keep Paquíta for an indefinite time to herself, for she had become extremely attached to her beautiful niece. The estancia was on the borders of the Paysandù department, and not less than two hundred miles from Montevideo. It was a long journey, and I was advised not to attempt it without a *tropilla*, or troop of horses. But when a native tells you that you cannot travel two hundred miles without a dozen horses, he only means that you cannot do the distance in two days; for it is hard for him to believe that one may

be satisfied with less than one hundred miles a day. *I* travelled on one horse, and it therefore took me several days to accomplish the journey. Before I reached my destination, called *Estancia de la Virgen de los Desamparados*, I met with some adventures worth relating, and began to feel as much at home with the *Orientales* as I had long been with the *Argentinos*.

Fortunately, after I left the town, a west wind continued blowing all day, bringing with it many light flying clouds to mitigate the sun, so that I was able to cover a good number of leagues before the evening. I took the road northwards through Camelones department, and was well on into the Florida department when I put up for the night at the solitary mud rancho of an old herdsman, who lived with his wife and children in a very primitive fashion. When I rode up to the house, several huge dogs rushed out to attack me: one seized my horse by the tail, dragging the poor beast about this way and that, so that he staggered and could scarcely keep his legs; another caught the bridle-reins in his mouth; while a third fixed his fangs in the heel of my boot. After eyeing me for some moments, the grizzled old herdsman, who wore a knife a yard long at his waist, advanced to the rescue. He shouted at the dogs, and finding that they would not obey, sprang forward and with a few dexterous blows, dealt with his heavy whip-handle, sent them away howling with rage and pain. Then he welcomed me with great courtesy, and very soon, when my horse had been unsaddled and turned loose to feed, we were sitting together enjoying the cool evening air and imbibing the

bitter and refreshing maté his wife served to us. While we conversed I noticed numberless fireflies flitting about; I had never seen them so numerous before, and they made a very lovely show. Presently one of the children, a bright little fellow of seven or eight, came running to us with one of the sparkling insects in his hand, and cried—

"Look, tatita, I have caught a *linterna*. See how bright it is!"

"The Saints forgive you, my child," said the father. "Go, little son, and put it back on the grass, for if you should hurt it, the spirits would be angry with you, for they go about by night and love the *linterna* that keeps them company."

What a pretty superstition, I thought; and what a mild, merciful heart this old Oriental herdsman must possess to show so much tenderness towards one of God's tiny creatures. I congratulated myself on my good fortune in having fallen in with such a person in this lonely place.

The dogs, after their rude behaviour to me and the sharp punishment they had suffered in consequence, had returned, and were now gathered around us lying on the ground. Here I noticed, not for the first time, that the dogs belonging to these lonely places are not nearly so fond of being noticed and caressed as are those of more populous and civilised districts. On attempting to stroke one of these surly brutes on the head, he displayed his teeth and growled savagely at me. Yet this animal, though so truculent in temper, and asking for no kindness from his master, is just as faithful to man as his

better-mannered brother in the more settled country. I spoke on that subject to my gentle herdsman.

"What you say is true," he replied. "I remember once during the siege of Montevideo, when I was with a small detachment sent to watch the movements of General Rivera's army, we one day overtook a man on a tired horse. Our officer, suspecting him to be a spy, ordered him to be killed, and after cutting his throat we left his body lying on the open ground at a distance of about two hundred and fifty yards from a small stream of water. A dog was with him, and when we rode off we called it to follow us, but it would not stir from its dead master's side.

"Three days later we returned to the same spot, to find the corpse lying just where we had left it. The foxes and birds had not touched it, for the dog was still there to defend it. Many vultures were near, waiting for a chance to begin their feast. We alighted to refresh ourselves at the stream, then stood there for half an hour watching the dog. He seemed to be half-famished with thirst, and came towards the stream to drink; but before he got half-way to it the vultures, by twos and threes, began to advance, when back he flew and chased them away barking. After resting a few minutes beside the corpse, he came again towards the stream, till, seeing the hungry birds advance once more, he again flew back at them, barking furiously and foaming at the mouth. This we saw repeated many times, and at last, when we left, we tried once more to entice the dog to follow us, but he would not. Two days after that we had occasion to pass

by that spot again, and there we saw the dog lying dead beside his dead master."

"Good God," I exclaimed, "how horrible must have been the feelings you and your companions experienced at such a sight!"

"No, señor, not at all," replied the old man. "Why, señor, I myself put the knife into that man's throat. For if a man did not grow accustomed to shed blood in this world, his life would be a burden to him."

What an inhuman old murderer! I thought. Then I asked him whether he had ever in his life felt remorse for shedding blood.

"Yes," he answered; "when I was a very young man, and had never before dipped weapon in human blood; that was when the siege began. I was sent with half a dozen men in pursuit of a clever spy, who had passed the lines with letters from the besieged. We came to a house where, our officer had been informed, he had been lying concealed. The master of the house was a young man about twenty-two years old. He would confess nothing. Finding him so stubborn, our officer became enraged, and bade him step out, and then ordered us to lance him. We galloped forty yards off, then wheeled back. He stood silent, his arms folded on his breast, a smile on his lips. Without a cry, without a groan, with that smile still on his lips, he fell pierced through with our lances. For days afterwards his face was ever present to me. I could not eat, for my food choked me. When I raised a jug of water to my lips I could, señor, distinctly see his eyes looking at me from the water. When I lay down to

sleep, his face was again before me, always with that smile that seemed to mock me on the lips. I could not understand it. They told me it was remorse, and that it would soon leave me, for there is no ill that time will not cure. They spoke truth, and when that feeling left me I was able to do all things."

The old man's story so sickened me that I had little appetite for supper, and passed a bad night thinking, waking or sleeping, of that young man in this obscure corner of the world who folded his arms and smiled on his slayers when they were slaying him. Very early next morning I bade my host good-bye, thanking him for his hospitality, and devoutly hoping that I should never look upon his abhorred face again.

I made little progress that day, the weather proving hot, and my horse lazier than ever. After riding about five leagues, I rested for a couple of hours, then proceeded again at a gentle trot till about the middle of the afternoon, when I dismounted at a wayside *pulpería*, or store and public-house all in one, where several natives were sipping rum and conversing. Standing before them was a brisk-looking old man—old, I say, because he had a dark dry skin, though his hair and moustache were black as jet—who paused in the discourse he appeared to be delivering, to salute me; then, after bestowing a searching glance on me out of his dark hawk-like eyes, he resumed his talk. After calling for rum and water, to be in the fashion, I sat down on a bench, and, lighting a cigarette, prepared to listen. He was dressed in shabby gaucho habiliments—cotton shirt, short jacket, wide cotton drawers and *chiripà*,

a shawl-like garment fastened at the waist with a sash, and reaching down half-way between the knees and ankles. In place of a hat he wore a cotton handkerchief tied carelessly about his head; his left foot was bare, while the right one was cased in a colt's-skin stocking, called *bota-de-potro*, and on this distinguished foot was buckled a huge iron spur, with spikes two inches long. One spur of the kind would be quite sufficient, I should imagine, to get out of a horse all the energy of which he was capable. When I entered he was holding forth on the pretty well-worn theme of fate *versus* free will; his arguments were not, however, the usual dry philosophical ones, but took the form of illustration, chiefly personal reminiscences and strange incidents in the lives of people he had known, while so vivid and minute were his descriptions—sparkling with passion, satire, humour, pathos, and so dramatic his action, while wonderful story followed story—that I was fairly astonished, and pronounced this old *pulpería* orator a born genius.

His argument over, he fixed his keen eyes on me and said—

"My friend, I perceive you are a traveller from Montevideo: may I ask what news there is from that city?"

"What news do you expect to hear?" said I; then it came into my thought that it was scarcely proper to confine myself to mere commonplace phrases in replying to this curious old Oriental bird, with such ragged plumage, but whose native woodnotes wild had such a charm in them. "It is only the old story over again!" I continued. "They say there will be a revolution some day. Some of

the people have already retired into their houses, after chalking in very big letters on their front doors, 'Please come into this house and cut the owner's throat for him, so that he may rest at peace, and have no fear of what may happen.' Others have climbed on to their roofs and occupy themselves there looking at the moon through spy-glasses, thinking that the conspirators are concealed in that luminary, and only waiting for a cloud to obscure it, in order to descend upon the city unobserved."

"Hear!" cried the old man, rapping delighted applause on the counter with his empty glass.

"What do you drink, friend?" I asked, thinking his keen appreciation of my grotesque speech deserved a treat, and wishing to draw him out a little more.

"Rum, friend, thank you. They say it warms you in winter, and cools you in summer—what can you have better?"

"Tell me," said I, when his glass had been refilled by the storekeeper, "what I shall say when I return to Montevideo, and am asked what news there is in the country?"

The old fellow's eyes twinkled, while the other men ceased talking, and looked at him as if anticipating something good in reply to my question.

"Say to them," he answered, "that you met an old man—a horse-tamer named Lucero—and that he told you this fable for you to repeat to the townspeople: Once there was a great tree named Montevideo growing in this country, and in its branches lived a colony of monkeys. One day one of the monkeys came down from the tree

and ran full of excitement across the plain, now scrambling along like a man on all fours, then erect like a dog running on its hind legs, while its tail with nothing to catch hold of wriggled about like a snake when its head is under foot. He came to a place where a number of oxen were grazing, and some horses, ostriches, deer, goats, and pigs. 'Friends all,' cried the monkey, grinning like a skull, and with staring eyes round as dollars, 'great news! great news! I come to tell you that there will shortly be a revolution.' 'Where?' said an ox. 'In the tree—where else?' said the monkey. 'That does not concern us,' said the ox. 'Oh, yes it does!' cried the monkey, 'for it will presently spread about the country and you will all have your throats cut.' Then the ox replied, 'Go back, monkey, and do not molest us with your news, lest we get angry and go to besiege you in your tree, as we have often had to do since the creation of the world; and then, if you and the other monkeys come down to us, we will toss you on our horns.'"

This apologue sounded very well, so admirably did the old man picture to us with voice and gesture the chattering excitement of the monkey and the majestic *àplomb* of the ox.

"Señor," he continued, after the laugh had subsided, "I do not wish any of my friends and neighbours here present to fly to the conclusion that I have spoken anything offensive. Had I seen in you a Montevidean I should not have spoken of monkeys. But, señor, though you speak as we do, there is yet in the pepper and salt on your tongue a certain foreign flavour."

"You are right," I said; "I am a foreigner."

"A foreigner in some things, friend, for you were doubtless born under other skies; but in that chief quality, which we think was given by the Creator to us and not to the people of other lands—the ability to be one in heart with the men you meet, whether they are clothed in velvet or in sheep skins—in that you are one of us, a pure Oriental."

I smiled at his subtle flattery; possibly it was only meant in payment of the rum I had treated him to, but it pleased me none the less, and to his other mental traits I was now inclined to add a marvellous skill in reading character.

After a while he invited me to spend the night under his roof. "Your horse is fat and lazy," he said with truth, "and unless you are a relation of the owl family, you cannot go much further before to-morrow. My house is a humble one, but the mutton is juicy, the fire warm, and the water cool there, the same as in another place."

I readily accepted his invitation, wishing to see as much as I could of so original a character, and before starting I purchased a bottle of rum, which made his eyes sparkle so that I thought his name—Lucero—rather an appropriate one. His rancho was about two miles from the store, and our ride thither was about as strange a gallop as I ever took. Lucero was a *domador*, or horse-tamer, and the beast he rode was quite unbroken and vicious as it could be. Between horse and man a fierce struggle for mastery raged the whole time, the horse rearing, plunging, buck-jumping, and putting into practice

every conceivable trick to rid itself of its burden; while Lucero plied whip and spur with tremendous energy and poured out torrents of strange adjectives. At one moment he would come into violent collision with my old sober beast, at another there would be fifty yards of ground between us; still Lucero would not stop talking, for he had begun a very interesting story at starting and he stuck to his narrative through everything, resuming the thread after each tempest of execration vented on his horse, and raising his voice almost to a shout when we were far apart. The old fellow's staying powers were really extraordinary, and when we arrived at the house he jumped airily to the ground and seemed fresh and calm as possible.

In the kitchen were several people sipping maté, Lucero's children and grandchildren, also his wife, a grey old dame with dim-looking eyes. But then my host was old in years himself, only, like Ulysses, he still possessed the unquenched fire and energy of youth in his soul, while time bestowed infirmities together with wrinkles and white hairs on his helpmate.

He introduced me to her in a manner that brought the modest flame to my cheek. Standing before her, he said that he had met me at the *pulpería* and had put to me the question which a simple old countryman must ask of every traveller from Montevideo—What the news was? Then, assuming a dry satirical tone, which years of practice would not enable me to imitate, he proceeded to give my fantastical answer, garnished with much original matter of his own.

"Señora," I said when he had finished, "you must not give me credit for all you have heard from your husband. I only gave him brute wool, and he has woven it for your delight into beautiful cloth."

"Hear him! Did I not tell you what to expect, Juana?" cried the old man, which made me blush still more.

We then settled down to maté and quiet conversation. Sitting in the kitchen on the skull of a horse—a common article of furniture in an Oriental rancho—was a boy about twelve years old, one of Lucero's grandchildren, with a very beautiful face. His feet were bare and his clothes very poor, but his soft dark eyes and olive face had that tender half-melancholy expression often seen in children of Spanish origin, which is always so strangely captivating.

"Where is your guitar, Cipriano?" said his grandfather, addressing him, whereupon the boy rose and fetched a guitar which he first politely offered to me.

When I had declined it, he seated himself once more on his polished horse skull and began to play and sing. He had a sweet boy's voice, and one of his ballads took my fancy so much that I made him repeat the words to me while I wrote them down in my notebook, which greatly gratified Lucero, who seemed proud of the boy's accomplishment. Here are the words translated almost literally, therefore without rhymes, and I only regret that I cannot furnish my musical readers with the quaint, plaintive air they were sung to:—

O let me go—O let me go,
Where high are born amidst the hills
The streams that gladden all the south,
And o'er the grassy desert wide,
Where slakes his thirst the antlered deer,
Hurry towards the great green ocean.

The stony hills—the stony hills,
With azure air-flowers on their crags,
Where cattle stray unowned by man;
The monarch of the herd there seems
No bigger than my hand in size,
Roaming along the tall, steep summit.

I know them well—I know them well,
Those hills of God, and they know me;
When I go there they are serene,
But when the stranger visits them
Dark rain-clouds gather round their tops—
Over the earth goes forth the tempest.

Then tell me not—then tell me not
'Tis sorrowful to dwell alone:
My heart within the city pent
Pines for the desert's liberty;
The streets are red with blood, and fear
Makes pale the mournful women's faces.

O bear me far—O bear me far,
On swift, sure feet, my trusty steed:
I do not love the burial-ground,
But I shall sleep upon the plain,
Where long green grass shall round me wave—
Over me graze wild herds of cattle.

CHAPTER III

MATERIALS FOR A PASTORAL

LEAVING the eloquent old horse-tamer's rancho early next morning, I continued my ride, jogging quietly along all day and, leaving the Florida department behind me, entered upon that of the Durazno. Here I broke my journey at an estancia where I had an excellent opportunity of studying the manners and customs of the Orientals, and where I also underwent experiences of a mixed character and greatly increased my knowledge of the insect world. This house, at which I arrived an hour before sunset to ask for shelter ("permission to unsaddle" is the expression the traveller uses), was a long, low structure, thatched with rushes, but the low, enormously thick walls were built of stone from the neighbouring sierras, in pieces of all shapes and sizes, and presenting, outwardly, the rough appearance of a stone fence. How these rudely piled-up stones, without cement to hold them together, had not fallen down was a mystery to me; and it was more difficult still to imagine why the rough interior, with its innumerable dusty holes and interstices, had never been plastered.

I was kindly received by a very numerous family, consisting of the owner, his hoary-headed old mother-in-law

his wife, three sons, and five daughters, all grown up. There were also several small children, belonging, I believe, to the daughters, notwithstanding the fact that they were unmarried. I was greatly amazed at hearing the name of one of these youngsters. Such Christian names as Trinity, Heart of Jesus, Nativity, John of God, Conception, Ascension, Incarnation, are common enough, but these had scarcely prepared me to meet with a fellow-creature named—well, Circumcision! Besides the people, there were dogs, cats, turkeys, ducks, geese, and fowls without number. Not content with all these domestic birds and beasts, they also kept a horrid, shrieking paroquet, which the old woman was incessantly talking to, explaining to the others all the time, in little asides, what the bird said or wished to say, or, rather, what she imagined it wished to say. There were also several tame young ostriches, always hanging about the big kitchen or living-room on the look-out for a brass thimble, or iron spoon, or other little metallic *bonne bouche* to be gobbled up when no one was looking. A pet armadillo kept trotting in and out, in and out, the whole evening, and a lame gull was always standing on the threshold in everybody's way, perpetually wailing for something to eat—the most persistent beggar I ever met in my life.

The people were very jovial and rather industrious for so indolent a country. The land was their own, the men tended the cattle, of which they appeared to have a large number, while the women made cheeses, rising before daylight to milk the cows.

During the evening two or three young men—neigh-

bours, I imagine, who were paying their addresses to the young ladies of the establishment—dropped in; and after a plentiful supper we had singing and dancing to the music of the guitar, on which every member of the family —excepting the babies—could strum a little.

About eleven o'clock I retired to rest, and stretching myself on my rude bed of rugs, in a room adjoining the kitchen, I blessed these simple-minded hospitable people. Good heavens, thought I to myself, what a glorious field is waiting here for some new Theocritus! How unutterably worn out, stilted, and artificial seems all the so-called pastoral poetry ever written when one sits down to supper and joins in the graceful *Cielo* or *Pericon* in one of these remote semi-barbarous South American estancias! I swear I will turn poet myself, and go back some day to astonish old *blasé* Europe with something so—so—— What the deuce was that? My sleepy soliloquy was suddenly brought to a most lame and impotent conclusion, for I had heard a sound of terror—the unmistakable *zz-zzing* of an insect's wings. It was the hateful vinchuca. Here was an enemy against which British pluck and six-shooters are of no avail, and in whose presence one begins to experience sensations which are not usually supposed to enter into the brave man's breast. Naturalists tell us that it is the *Connorhinus infestans*, but as that information leaves something to be desired, I will proceed in a few words to describe the beast. It inhabits the entire Chilian, Argentine, and Oriental countries, and to all the dwellers in this vast territory it is known as the vinchuca; for, like a few volcanoes, deadly vipers, cata-

racts, and other sublime natural objects, it has been permitted to keep the ancient name bestowed on it by the aborigines. It is all over of a blackish-brown colour, as broad as a man's thumb-nail, and flat as the blade of a table-knife—when fasting. By day it hides, bug-like, in holes and chinks, but no sooner are the candles put out, than forth it comes to seek whom it may devour; for, like the pestilence, it walks in darkness. It can fly, and in a dark room knows where you are and can find you. Having selected a nice tender part, it pierces the skin with its proboscis or rostrum, and sucks vigorously for two or three minutes, and, strange to say, you do not feel the operation, even when lying wide awake. By that time the creature, so attenuated before, has assumed the figure, size, and general appearance of a ripe gooseberry, so much blood has it drawn from your veins. Immediately after it has left you the part begins to swell up and burn as if stung by nettles. That the pain should come after and not during the operation is an arrangement very advantageous to the vinchuca, and I greatly doubt whether any other blood-sucking parasite has been equally favoured by nature in this respect.

Imagine then my sensations when I heard the sound of not one, but two or three pairs of wings! I tried to forget the sound and go to sleep. I tried to forget about those rough old walls full of interstices—a hundred years old they were, my host had informed me. Most interesting old house, thought I; and then very suddenly a fiery itching took possession of my great toe. There it is! said I; heated blood, late supper, dancing, and all that.

I can almost imagine that something has actually bitten me, when of course nothing of that kind has happened. Then, while I was furiously rubbing and scratching it, feeling a badger-like disposition to gnaw it off, my left arm was pierced with red-hot needles. My attentions were quickly transferred to that part; but soon my busy hands were called elsewhere, like a couple of hard-worked doctors in a town afflicted with an epidemic; and so all night long, with only occasional snatches of miserable sleep, the contest went on.

I rose early, and going to a wide stream, a quarter of a mile from the house, took a plunge which greatly refreshed me and gave me strength to go in quest of my horse. Poor brute! I had intended giving him a day's rest, so pleasant and hospitable had the people shown themselves; but now I shuddered at the thought of spending another night in such a purgatory. I found him so lame that he could scarcely walk, and so returned to the house on foot and very much cast down. My host consoled me by assuring me that I would sleep the siesta all the better for having been molested by those "little things that go about," for in this very mild language he described the affliction. After breakfast, at noon, acting on his hint, I took a rug to the shade of a tree and, lying down, quickly fell into a profound sleep which lasted till late in the afternoon.

That evening visitors came again and we had a repetition of the singing, dancing, and other pastoral amusements, till near midnight; then, thinking to cheat my bedfellows of the night before, I made my simple bed in

the kitchen. But here also the vile vinchucas found me, and there were, moreover, dozens of fleas that waged a sort of guerilla warfare all night, and in this way exhausted my strength and distracted my attention, while the more formidable adversary took up his position. My sufferings were so great that before daybreak I picked up my rugs and went out a distance from the house to lie down on the open plain, but I carried with me a smarting body and got but little rest. When morning came I found that my horse had not yet recovered from his lameness.

"Do not be in a hurry to leave us," said my host, when I spoke of it; "I perceive that the little animals have again fought with and defeated you. Do not mind it; in time you will grow accustomed to them."

How *they* contrived to endure it, or even to exist, was a puzzle to me; but possibly the vinchucas respected them, and only dined when, like the giant in the nursery rhyme, they "smelt the blood of an Englishman."

I again enjoyed a long siesta, and when night came resolved to place myself beyond the reach of the vampires, and so, after supper, went out to sleep on the plain. About midnight, however, a sudden storm of wind and rain drove me back to the shelter of the house, and the next morning I rose in such a deplorable state that I deliberately caught and saddled my horse, though the poor beast could scarcely put one foot on the ground. My friends laughed good-humouredly when they saw me making these resolute preparations for departure. After partaking of bitter maté, I rose and thanked them for their hospitality.

"You surely do not intend leaving us on that animal!" said my host. "He is unfit to carry you."

"I have no other," I replied, "and am anxious to reach my destination."

"Had I known this I should have offered you a horse before," he returned, and then he sent one of his sons to drive the horses of the estancia into the corral.

Selecting a good-looking animal from the herd, he presented it to me, and as I did not have money enough to buy a fresh horse whenever I wanted one, I accepted the gift very gladly. The saddle was quickly transferred to my new acquisition, and once more thanking these good people and bidding adieu, I resumed my journey.

When I gave my hand before leaving to the youngest, and also, to my mind, the prettiest of the five daughters of the house, instead of smiling pleasantly and wishing me a prosperous journey, like the others, she was silent, and darted a look at me, which seemed to say, "Go, sir; you have treated me badly, and you insult me by offering your hand; if I take it, it is not because I feel disposed to forgive you, but only to save appearances."

At the same moment, when she bestowed that glance on me which said so much, a look of intelligence passed over the faces of the other people in the room. All this revealed to me that I had just missed a very pretty little idyllic flirtation, conducted in very novel circumstances. Love cometh up as a flower, and men and charming women naturally flirt when brought together. Yet it was hard to imagine how I could have started a flirtation and carried it on to its culminatory point in that great

public room, with all those eyes on me; dogs, babes, and cats tumbling about my feet; ostriches staring covetously at my buttons with great vacant eyes; and that intolerable paroquet perpetually reciting "How the waters came down at Lodore," in its own shrieky, beaky, birdy, hurdy-gurdy, parrot language. Tender glances, soft whispered words, hand-touchings, and a thousand little personal attentions, showing which way the emotions tend, would scarcely have been practicable in such a place and in such conditions, and new signs and symbols would have to be invented to express the feelings of the heart. And doubtless these Orientals, living all together in one great room, with their children and pets, like our very ancient ancestors, the pastoral Aryans, do possess such a language. And this pretty language I should have learnt from the most willing of teachers, if those venomous vinchucas had not dulled my brain with their persecutions and made me blind to a matter which had not escaped the observation of even unconcerned lookers-on. Riding away from the estancia, the feeling I experienced at having finally escaped from these execrable "little things that go about" was not one of unmixed satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV

VAGABONDS' REST

CONTINUING my journey through the Durazno district, I forded the pretty River Yí and entered the Tacuarembó department, which is immensely long, extending right away to the Brazilian frontier. I rode over its narrowest part, however, where it is only about twenty-five miles wide; then crossing two very curiously named rivers, Rios Salsipuedes Chico and Salsipuedes Grande, which mean Get-out-if-you-can Rivers, Little and Big, I at length reached the termination of my journey in the province or department of Paysandù. The *Estancia de la Virgen de los Desamparados*, or, to put it very shortly, Vagabonds' Rest, was a good-sized square brick house built on very high ground, which overlooked an immense stretch of grassy undulating country. There was no plantation about the house, not even a shade tree or cultivated plant of any description, but only some large *corrales*, or enclosures, for the cattle, of which there were six or seven thousand head on the land. The absence of shade and greenery gave the place a desolate, uninviting aspect, but if I was ever to have any authority here this would soon be changed. The Mayordomo, or manager, Don Policarpo Santierra de Peñalosa, which, roughly done

into English, means Polycarp of the Holy Land abounding in Slippery Rocks, proved to be a very pleasant, affable person. He welcomed me with that quiet Oriental politeness which is never cold and never effusive, and then perused the letter from Doña Isidora. Finally he said, "I am willing, my friend, to supply you with all the conveniences procurable at this elevation; and, for the rest, you know, doubtless, what I can say to you. A ready understanding requires few words. Nevertheless, there is here no lack of good beef, and, to be short, you will do me a great favour by making this house with everything it contains your own, while you honour us by remaining in it."

After delivering himself of these kindly sentiments, which left me rather in a mist as to my prospects, he mounted his horse and rode off, probably on some very important affair, for I saw no more of him for several days.

I at once proceeded to establish myself in the kitchen. No person in the house appeared ever to pay even a casual visit to any other room. This kitchen was vast and barn-like, forty feet long at least, and proportionately wide; the roof was of reeds, and the hearth, placed in the centre of the floor, was a clay platform, fenced round with cows' shank-bones, half buried and standing upright. Some trivets and iron kettles were scattered about, and from the centre beam, supporting the roof, a chain and hook were suspended to which a vast iron pot was fastened. One more article, a spit about six feet long for roasting meat, completed the list of cooking utensils.

There were no chairs, tables, knives, or forks; everyone carried his own knife, and at meal-time the boiled meat was emptied into a great tin dish, whilst the roast was eaten from the spit, each one laying hold with his fingers and cutting his slice. The seats were logs of wood and horse-skulls. The household was composed of one woman, an ancient, hideously ugly, grey-headed negress, about seventy years old, and eighteen or nineteen men of all ages and sizes, and of all colours from parchment-white to very old oak. There was a *capatas*, or overseer, and seven or eight paid *peones*, the others being all *agregados* —that is, supernumeraries without pay, or, to put it plainly, vagabonds who attach themselves like vagrant dogs to establishments of this kind, lured by the abundance of flesh, and who occasionally assist the regular *peones* at their work, and also do a little gambling and stealing to keep themselves in small change. At break of day everyone was up sitting by the hearth sipping bitter maté and smoking cigarettes; before sunrise all were mounted and away over the surrounding country to gather up the herds; at midday they were back again to breakfast. The consumption and waste of meat was something frightful. Frequently, after breakfast, as much as twenty or thirty pounds of boiled and roast meat would be thrown into a wheelbarrow and carried out to the dust-heap, where it served to feed scores of hawks, gulls, and vultures, besides the dogs.

Of course, I was only an *agregado*, having no salary or regular occupation yet. Thinking, however, that this would only be for a time, I was quite willing to make

the best of things, and very soon became fast friends with my fellow *agregados*, joining heartily in all their amusements and voluntary labours.

In a few days I got very tired of living exclusively on flesh, for not even a biscuit was "procurable at this elevation"; and as for a potato, one might as well have asked for a plum-pudding. It occurred to my mind at last that, with so many cows, it might be possible to procure some milk and introduce a little change into our diet. In the evening I broached the subject, proposing that on the following day we should capture a cow and tame her. Some of the men approved of the suggestion, remarking that they had never thought of it themselves; but the old negress, who, being the only representative of the fair sex present, was always listened to with all the deference due to her position, threw herself with immense zeal into the opposition. She affirmed that no cow had been milked at that establishment since its owner had paid it a visit with his young wife twelve years before. A milch-cow was then kept, and on the señora partaking of a large quantity of milk "before breaking her fast," it produced such an indigestion in her that they were obliged to give her powdered ostrich stomach, and finally to convey her, with great trouble, in an ox-cart to Paysandù and thence by water to Montevideo. The owner ordered the cow to be released, and never, to her certain knowledge, had cow been milked since at La Virgen de los Desamparados.

These ominous croakings produced no effect on me, and the next day I returned to the subject. I did not possess

a lasso, and so could not undertake to capture a half-wild cow without assistance. One of my fellow *agregados* at length volunteered to help me, observing that he had not tasted milk for several years, and was inclined to renew his acquaintance with that singular beverage. This new-found friend in need merits being formally introduced to the reader. His name was Epifanio Claro. He was tall and thin, and had an idiotic expression on his long, sallow face. His cheeks were innocent of whiskers, and his lank, black hair, parted in the middle, fell to his shoulders, enclosing his narrow face between a pair of raven's wings. He had very large, light-coloured, sheepish-looking eyes, and his eyebrows bent up like a couple of Gothic arches, leaving a narrow strip above them that formed the merest apology for a forehead. This facial peculiarity had won for him the nickname of Cejas (Eyebrows), by which he was known to his intimates. He spent most of his time strumming on a wretched old cracked guitar, and singing amorous ballads in a lugubrious whining falsetto, which reminded me not a little of that hungry, complaining gull I had met at the estancia in Durazno. For though poor Epifanio had an absorbing passion for music, Nature had unkindly withheld from him the power to express it in a manner pleasing to others. I must, however, in justice to him, allow that he gave a preference to ballads or compositions of a thoughtful, not to say metaphysical, character. I took the trouble of translating the words of one literally, and here they are :—

Yesterday my senses opened,
At a rap-a-tap from Reason,

Inspiring in me an intention
Which I never had before,
Seeing that through all my days
My life has been just what it is.
Therefore when I rose I said,
To-day shall be as yesterday,
Since Reason tells me I have been
From day to day the self-same thing.

This is very little to judge from, being only a fourth part of the song; but it is a fair specimen, and the rest is no clearer. Of course it is not to be supposed that Epifanio Claro, an illiterate person, took in the whole philosophy of these lines; still it is probable that a subtle ray or two of their deep meaning touched his intellect, to make him a wiser and a sadder man.

Accompanied by this strange individual, and with the grave permission of the *capatas*, who declined, however, in words of many syllables all *responsabilidad* in the matter, we went out to the grazing grounds in quest of a promising-looking cow. Very soon we found one to our liking. She was followed by a small calf, not more than a week old, and her distended udder promised a generous supply of milk; but unfortunately she was fierce-tempered, and had horns as sharp as needles.

"We will cut them by-and-by," shouted Eyebrows.

He then lassoed the cow, and I captured the calf, and lifting it into the saddle before me, started homewards. The cow followed me at a furious pace, and behind came Claro at a swinging gallop. Possibly he was a little too confident, and carelessly let his captive pull the line that held her; anyhow, she turned suddenly on him, charged

with amazing fury, and sent one of her horrid horns deep into the belly of his horse. He was, however, equal to the occasion, first dealing her a smart blow on the nose, which made her recoil for a moment; he then severed the lasso with his knife, and shouting to me to drop the calf, made his escape. We pulled up as soon as we had reached a safe distance, Claro drily remarking that the lasso had been borrowed, and that the horse belonged to the estancia, so that we had lost nothing. He alighted, and stitched up the great gash in the poor brute's belly, using for a thread a few hairs plucked from its tail. It was a difficult task, or would have been so to me, as he had to bore holes in the animal's hide with his knife-point, but it seemed quite easy to him. Taking the remaining portion of the severed lasso, he drew it round the hind and one of the fore feet of his horse, and threw him to the ground with a dexterous jerk; then, binding him there, performed the operation of sewing up the wound in about two minutes.

"Will he live?" I asked.

"How can I tell," he answered indifferently. "I only know that now he will be able to carry me home; if he dies afterwards what will it matter?"

We then mounted and rode quietly home. Of course we were chaffed without mercy, especially by the old negress, who had foreseen all along, she told us, just how it would be. One would have imagined, to hear this old black creature talk, that she looked on milk-drinking as one of the greatest moral offences man could be guilty of, and that in this case Providence had miraculously

interposed to prevent us from gratifying our depraved appetites.

Eyebrows took it all very coolly.

"Do not notice them," he said to me. "The lasso was not ours, the horse was not ours, what does it matter what they say?"

The owner of the lasso, who had good-naturedly lent it to us, roused himself on hearing this. He was a very big, rough-looking man, his face covered with an immense shaggy black beard. I had taken him for a good-humoured specimen of the giant kind before, but I now changed my opinion of him when his angry passions began to rise. Blas, or Barbudo, as we called the giant, was seated on a log sipping maté.

"Perhaps you take me for a sheep, sirs, because you see me wrapped in skins," he observed; "but let me tell you this, the lasso I lent you must be returned to me."

"These words are not for us," remarked Eyebrows, addressing me, "but for the cow that carried away his lasso on her horns—curse them for being so sharp!"

"No, sir," returned Barbudo, "do not deceive yourself; they are not for the cow, but for the fool that lassoed the cow. And I promise you, Epifanio, that if it is not restored to me, this thatch over our heads will not be broad enough to shelter us both."

"I am pleased to hear it," said the other, "for we are short of seats; and when you leave us, the one you now encumber with your carcass will be occupied by some more meritorious person."

"You can say what you like, for no one has yet put a

padlock on your lips," said Barbudo, raising his voice to a shout; "but you are not going to plunder me; and if my lasso is not restored to me, then I swear I will make myself a new one out of a human hide."

"Then," said Eyebrows, "the sooner you provide yourself with a hide for the purpose, the better, for I will never return the lasso to you; for who am I to fight against Providence, that took it out of my hands?"

To this Barbudo replied furiously—

"Then I will have it from this miserable starved foreigner, who comes here to learn to eat meat and put himself on an equality with men. Evidently he was weaned too soon; but if the starveling hungers for infant's food, let him in future milk the cats that warm themselves beside the fire, and can be caught without a lasso, even by a Frenchman!"

I could not endure the brute's insults, and sprang up from my seat. I happened to have a large knife in my hand, for we were just preparing to make an assault on the roasted ribs of a cow, and my first impulse was to throw down the knife and give him a blow with my fist. Had I attempted it I should most probably have paid dearly for my rashness. The instant I rose Barbudo was on me, knife in hand. He aimed a furious blow, which luckily missed me, and at the same moment I struck him, and he reeled back with a dreadful gash on his face. It was all done in a second of time, and before the others could interpose; in another moment they disarmed us, and set about bathing the barbarian's wound. During the operation, which I daresay was very painful, for the old negress insisted on having the wound bathed with rum

instead of water, the brute blasphemed outrageously, vowing that he would cut out my heart and eat it stewed with onions and seasoned with cummin seed and various other condiments.

I have often since thought of that sublime culinary conception of Blas the barbarian. There must have been a spark of wild Oriental genius in his bovine brains.

When the exhaustion caused by rage, pain, and loss of blood had at length reduced him to silence, the old negress turned on him, exclaiming that he had been rightly punished, for had he not, in spite of her timely warnings, lent his lasso to enable these two heretics (for that is what she called us) to capture a cow? Well, his lasso was lost; then his friends, with the gratitude only to be expected from milk-drinkers, had turned round and well-nigh killed him.

After supper the *capatas* got me alone, and with excessive friendliness of manner, and an abundance of circumlocutory phrases, advised me to leave the estancia, as it would not be safe for me to remain. I replied that I was not to blame, having struck the man in self-defence; also, that I had been sent to the estancia by a friend of the Mayordomo, and was determined to see him and give him my version of the affair.

The *capatas* shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigarette.

At length Don Policarpo returned, and when I told him my story he laughed slightly, but said nothing. In the evening I reminded him of the subject of the letter I had brought from Montevideo, asking him whether it was his intention to give me some employment on the estancia.

"You see, my friend," he replied, "to employ you now would be useless, however valuable your services might be, for by this time the authorities will have information of your fight with Blas. In the course of a few days you may expect them here to make inquiries into that affair, and it is probable that you and Blas will both be taken into custody."

"What then would you advise me to do?" I asked.

His answer was, that when the ostrich asked the deer what he would advise him to do when the hunters appeared, the deer's reply was, "Run away."

I laughed at his pretty apologue, and answered that I did not think the authorities would trouble themselves about me—also that I was not fond of running away.

Eyebrows, who had hitherto been rather inclined to patronise me and take me under his protection, now became very warm in his friendship, which was, however, dashed with an air of deference when we were alone together, but in company he was fond of parading his familiarity with me. I did not quite understand this change of manner at first, but by-and-by he took me mysteriously aside and became extremely confidential.

"Do not distress yourself about Barbudo," he said. 'He will never again presume to lift his hand against you; and if you will only condescend to speak kindly to him, he will be your humble slave, and proud to have you wipe your greasy fingers on his beard. Take no notice of what the Mayordomo says, he also is afraid of you. If the authorities take you, it will only be to see what you can give them: they will not keep you long, for you

are a foreigner, and cannot be made to serve in the army. But when you are again at liberty it will be necessary for you to kill someone."

Very much amazed, I asked him why.

"You see," he replied, "your reputation as a fighter is now established in this department, and there is nothing men envy more. It is the same as in our old game of *Pato*, where the man that carries the duck away is pursued by all the others, and before they give up chasing him he must prove that he can keep what he has taken. There are several fighters you do not know, who have resolved to pick quarrels with you in order to try your strength. In your next fight you must not wound but kill, or you will have no peace."

I was greatly disturbed at this result of my accidental victory over Blas the Bearded, and did not at all appreciate the kind of greatness my officious friend Claro seemed so determined to thrust upon me. It was certainly flattering to hear that I had already established my reputation as a good fighter in so warlike a department as Paysandù, but then the consequences entailed were disagreeable, to say the least of it; and so, while thanking Eyebrows for his friendly hint, I resolved to quit the estancia at once. I would not run away from the authorities, since I was not an evil-doer, but from the necessity of killing people for the sake of peace and quietness I certainly would depart. And early next morning, to my friend's intense disgust, and without telling my plans to anyone, I mounted my horse and quitted Vagabonds' Rest to pursue my adventures elsewhere.

CHAPTER V

A COLONY OF ENGLISH GENTLEMEN

FAITH in the estancia as a field for my activities had been weak from the first; the Mayordomo's words on his return had extinguished it altogether; and after hearing that ostrich parable I had only remained from motives of pride. I now determined to go back towards Montevideo, not, however, over the route I had come by, but making a wide circuit into the interior of the country, where I would explore a new field and perhaps meet with some occupation at one of the estancias on the way. Riding in a south-westerly direction towards the Rio Malo in the Tacuarembó department, I soon left the plains of Paysandù behind me, and being anxious to get well away from a neighbourhood where I was expected to kill someone, I did not rest till I had ridden about twenty-five miles. At noon I stopped to get some refreshment at a little roadside *pulpería*. It was a wretched-looking place, and behind the iron bars protecting the interior, giving it the appearance of a wild beast's cage, lounged the storekeeper smoking a cigar. Outside the bar were two men with English-looking faces. One was a handsome young fellow with a somewhat worn and dissipated look on his bronzed face; he was leaning against the counter, cigar in

mouth, looking slightly tipsy, I thought, and wore a large revolver slung ostentatiously at his waist. His companion was a big, heavy man, with immense whiskers sprinkled with grey, who was evidently very drunk, for he was lying full-length on a bench, his face purple and swollen, snoring loudly. I asked for bread, sardines, and wine, and careful to observe the custom of the country I was in, duly invited the tipsy young man to join in the repast. An omission of this courtesy might, amongst proud and sensitive Orientals, involve one in a sanguinary quarrel, and of quarrelling I had just then had enough.

He declined with thanks, and entered into conversation with me; then the discovery, quickly made, that we were compatriots gave us both great pleasure. He at once offered to take me to his house with him, and gave a glowing account of the free, jovial life he led in company with several other Englishmen—sons of gentlemen, every one of them, he assured me—who had bought a piece of land and settled down to sheep-farming in this lonely district. I gladly accepted the invitation, and when we had finished our glasses he proceeded to wake the sleeper.

"Hullo, I say, Cap, wake up, old boy," shouted my new friend. "Quite time to go home, don't you know. That's right—up you come. Now let me introduce you to Mr. Lamb. I'm sure he's an acquisition. What, off again! Damn it, old Cloud, that's unreasonable, to say the least of it."

At length, after a great deal of shouting and shaking, he succeeded in rousing his drunken companion, who staggered up and stared at me in an imbecile manner.

"Now let me introduce you," said the other. "Mr. Lamb. My friend, Captain Cloudesley Wriothesley. Bravo! Steady, old cock—now shake hands."

The Captain said nothing, but took my hand, swaying forwards as if about to embrace me. We then with considerable difficulty got him on to his saddle and rode off together, keeping him between us to prevent him from falling off. Half an hour's ride brought us to my host Mr. Vincent Winchcombe's house. I had pictured to myself a charming little homestead, buried in cool greenery and flowers, and filled with pleasant memories of dear old England; I was, therefore, grievously disappointed to find that his "home" was only a mean-looking rancho, with a ditch round it, protecting some ploughed or dug-up ground, on which not one green thing appeared. Mr. Winchcombe explained, however, that he had not yet had time to cultivate much. "Only vegetables and such things, don't you know," he said.

"I don't see them," I returned.

"Well, no; we had a lot of caterpillars and blister beetles and things, and they ate everything up, don't you know," said he.

The room into which he conducted me contained no furniture except a large deal table and some chairs; also a cupboard, a long mantelpiece, and some shelves against the walls. On every available place were pipes, pouches, revolvers, cartridge boxes, and empty bottles. On the table were tumblers, cups, a sugar-basin, a monstrous tin teapot, and a demijohn, which I soon ascertained was half-full of Brazilian rum, or caña. Round the table five

men were seated smoking, drinking tea and rum and talking excitedly, all of them more or less intoxicated. They gave me a hearty welcome, making me join them at the table, pouring out tea and rum for me, and generously pushing pipes and pouches towards me.

"You see," said Mr. Winchcombe, in explanation of this convivial scene, "there are, altogether, ten of us settlers here going in for sheep-farming and that sort of thing. Four of us have already built houses and bought sheep and horses. The other six fellows live with us from house to house, don't you know. Well, we've made a jolly arrangement — old Cloud — Captain Cloud, don't you know, first suggested it—and it is that every day one of the four—the Glorious Four we are called—keeps open house; and it's considered the right thing for the other nine fellows to drop in on him some time during the day, just to cheer him up a bit. Well, we soon made the discovery—old Cloud, I fancy, made it—that tea and rum were about the best things to have on these occasions. To-day it was my day and to-morrow it will be some other fellow's, don't you know. And, by Jove, how lucky I was to meet you at the *pulpería!* It will be ever so much jollier now."

I had certainly not stumbled upon a charming little English paradise in this Oriental wilderness, and as it always makes me uncomfortable to see young men drifting into intemperate habits and making asses of themselves generally, I was not rapturously delighted with "old Cloud's" system. Still I was glad to find myself with Englishmen in this distant country, and in the end I

succeeded in making myself tolerably happy. The discovery that I had a voice pleased them greatly, and when, somewhat excited from the effects of strong cavendish, rum, and black tea, I roared out—

> And may his soul in heaven dwell,
> Who first found out the leather botél,

they all got up and drank my health in big tumblers, and declared they would never let me leave the colony.

Before evening the guests departed, all except the Captain. He had sat with us at the table, but was too far gone in his cups to take part in the boisterous fun and conversation. Once in about every five minutes he had implored someone in a husky voice to give him a light for his pipe, then, after two or three ineffectual puffs, he would let it go out again. He had also attempted two or three times to join in the chorus of a song, but soon relapsed again into his imbecile condition.

Next day, however, when he sat down refreshed by a night's sleep to breakfast, I found him a very agreeable fellow. He had no house of his own yet, not having received his money from home, he confidentially informed me, but lived about, breakfasting in one house, dining in a second, and sleeping in a third. "Never mind," he would say, "by-and-by it will be my turn; then I will receive you all every day for six weeks to make it all square."

None of the colonists did any work, but all spent their time lounging about and visiting each other, trying to make their dull existence endurable by perpetual smoking and tea and rum drinking. They had tried, they told

me, ostrich-hunting, visiting their native neighbours, partridge-shooting, horse-racing, etc.; but the partridges were too tame for them, they could never catch the ostriches, the natives didn't understand them, and they had finally given up all these so-called amusements. In each house a peon was kept to take care of the flock and to cook, and as the sheep appeared to take care of themselves, and the cooking merely meant roasting a piece of meat on a spit, there was very little for the hired men to do.

"Why don't you do these things for yourselves?" I innocently asked.

"I fancy it wouldn't quite be the right thing, don't you know," said Mr. Winchcombe.

"No," said the Captain gravely, "we haven't quite come down to that yet."

I was greatly surprised to hear them. I had seen Englishmen sensibly roughing it in other places, but the lofty pride of these ten rum-drinking gentlemen was quite a new experience to me.

Having spent a somewhat listless morning, I was invited to accompany them to the house of Mr. Bingley, one of the Glorious Four. Mr. Bingley was really a very nice young fellow, living in a house far more worthy of the name than the slovenly rancho tenanted by his neighbour Winchcombe. He was the favourite of the colonists, having more money than the others, and keeping two servants. Always on his reception-day he provided his guests with hot bread and fresh butter, as well as with the indispensable rum-bottle and teapot. It therefore

happened that, when his turn came round to keep open house, not one of the other nine colonists was absent from his table.

Soon after our arrival at Bingley's, the others began to appear, each one on entering taking a seat at the hospitable board, and adding another cloud to the dense volume of tobacco smoke obscuring the room. There was a great deal of hilarious conversation; songs were sung, and a vast amount of tea, rum, bread and butter, and tobacco consumed; but it was a wearisome entertainment, and by the time it was over, I felt heartily sick of this kind of life.

Before separating, after "John Peel" had been sung with great enthusiasm, someone proposed that we should get up a fox-hunt in real English style. Everyone agreed, glad of anything, I suppose, to break the monotony of such an existence, and next day we rode out, followed by about twenty dogs, of various breeds and sizes, brought together from all the houses. After some searching about in the most likely places, we at length started a fox from a bed of dark-leafed Mio-mio bushes. He made straight away for a range of hills about three miles distant, and over a beautifully smooth plain, so that we had a very good prospect of running him down. Two of the hunters had provided themselves with horns, which they blew incessantly, while the others all shouted at the top of their lungs, so that our chase was a very noisy one. The fox appeared to understand his danger and to know that his only chance of escape lay in keeping up his strength till the refuge of the hills was reached. Suddenly, how-

ever, he changed his course, this giving us a great advantage, for by making a short cut we were all soon close at his heels, with only the wide level plain before us. But reynard had his reasons for what he did; he had spied a herd of cattle, and in a very few moments had overtaken and mixed with them. The herd, struck with terror at our shouts and horn-blowing, instantly scattered and flew in all directions, so that we were able still to keep our quarry in sight. Far in advance of us the panic in the cattle ran on from herd to herd, swift as light, and we could see them miles away fleeing from us, while their hoarse bellowings and thundering tread came borne by the wind faintly to our ears. Our fat lazy dogs ran no faster than our horses, but still they laboured on, cheered by incessant shouts, and at last ran into the first fox ever properly hunted in the Banda Oriental.

The chase, which had led us far from home, ended close to a large estancia house, and while we stood watching the dogs worrying their victim to death, the *capatas* of the establishment, accompanied by three men, rode out to inquire who we were, and what we were doing. He was a small dark native, wearing a very picturesque costume, and addressed us with extreme politeness.

"Will you tell me, señores, what strange animal you have captured?" he asked.

"A fox!" shouted Mr. Bingley, triumphantly waving the brush, which he had just cut off, over his head. "In our country—in England—we hunt the fox with dogs, and we have been hunting after the manner of our country."

The *capatas* smiled, and replied that if we were disposed to join him, it would afford him great pleasure to show us a hunt after the manner of the Banda Orientál.

We consented gladly, and mounting our horses, set off at a swinging gallop after the *capatas* and his men. We soon came to a small herd of cattle; the *capatas* dashed after them, and unloosening the coils of his lasso, flung the noose dexterously over the horns of a fat heifer he had singled out, then started homewards at a tremendous pace. The cow, urged forward by the men, who rode close behind and pricked it with their knives, rushed on, bellowing with rage and pain, trying to overtake the *capatas*, who kept just out of reach of its horns; and in this way we quickly reached the house. One of the men now flung his lasso and caught the beast's hind leg; pulled in two opposite directions, it quickly came to a standstill; the other men now dismounting, first hamstrung, then ran a long knife into its throat. Without removing the hide, the carcass was immediately cut up, and the choice pieces flung on to a great fire of wood, which one of the men had been making. In an hour's time we all sat down to a feast of *carne con cuero*, or meat roasted in the hide, juicy, tender, and exquisitely flavoured. I must tell the English reader who is accustomed to eat meat and game which has been kept till it is tender, that before the tender stage is reached, it has been permitted to get tough. Meat, game included, is never so tender or deliciously flavoured as when cooked and eaten immediately after it is killed. Compared with meat at any subsequent stage, it is like a new-laid egg or

a salmon with the cream on, compared with an egg or a salmon after a week's keeping.

We enjoyed the repast immensely, though Captain Cloud bitterly lamented that we had neither rum nor tea to wash it down. When we had thanked our entertainer and were about to turn our horses' heads homewards, the polite *capatas* once more stepped out and addressed us.

"Gentlemen," he said, "whenever you feel disposed to hunt, come to me and we will lasso and roast a heifer in the hide. It is the best dish the republic has to offer the stranger, and it will give me great pleasure to entertain you; but I beg you will hunt no more foxes over the ground belonging to this estancia, for you have caused so great a commotion amongst the cattle I am placed here in charge of, that it will take my men two or three days to find them all and bring them back again."

We gave the desired promise, plainly perceiving that fox-hunting in the English fashion is not a sport adapted to the Oriental country. Then we rode back, and spent the remaining hours at the house of Mr. Girling, of the Glorious Four, drinking rum and tea, smoking unlimited pipes of cavendish, and talking over our hunting experience.

CHAPTER VI

THE COLONY UNDER A CLOUD

I SPENT several days at the colony; and I suppose the life I led there had a demoralising effect on me, for unpleasant as it was, every day I felt less inclined to break loose from it, and sometimes I even thought seriously of settling down there myself. This crazy idea, however, would usually come to me late in the day, after a great deal of indulgence in rum and tea, a mixture that would very soon drive any man mad.

One afternoon, at one of our convivial meetings, it was resolved to pay a visit to the little town of Tolosa, about eighteen miles to the east of the colony. Next day we set out, every man wearing a revolver slung at his waist and provided with a heavy poncho for covering; for it was the custom of the colonists to spend the night at Tolosa when they visited it. We put up at a large public-house in the centre of the miserable little town, where there was accommodation for man and beast, the last always faring rather better than the first. I very soon discovered that the chief object of our visit was to vary the entertainment of drinking rum and smoking at the "Colony," by drinking rum and smoking at Tolosa. The bibulous battle raged till bedtime, when the only sober member of our party was

myself; for I had spent the greater part of the afternoon walking about talking to the townspeople, in the hope of picking up some information useful to me in my search for occupation. But the women and old men I met gave me little encouragement. They seemed to be a rather listless set in Tolosa, and when I asked them what they were doing to make a livelihood, they said they were *waiting*. My fellow-countrymen and their visit to the town was the principal topic of conversation. They regarded their English neighbours as strange and dangerous creatures, who took no solid food, but subsisted on a mixture of rum and gunpowder (which was the truth), and who were armed with deadly engines called revolvers, invented specially for them by their father the devil. The day's experience convinced me that the English colony had some excuse for its existence, since its periodical visits gave the good people of Tolosa a little wholesome excitement during the stagnant intervals between the revolutions.

At night we all turned into a large room with a clay floor, in which there was not a single article of furniture. Our saddles, rugs, and ponchos had all been thrown together in a corner, and anyone wishing to sleep had to make himself a bed with his own horse-gear and toggery as best he could. The experience was nothing new to me, so I soon made myself a comfortable nest on the floor, and, pulling off my boots, coiled myself up like an opossum that knows nothing better and is friendly with fleas. My friends, however, were evidently bent on making a night of it, and had taken care to provide

themselves with three or four bottles of rum. After conversation, with an occasional song, had been going on for some time, one of them—a Mr. Chillingworth—rose to his feet and demanded silence.

"Gentlemen," he said, advancing into the middle of the room, where, by occasionally throwing out his arms to balance himself, he managed to maintain a tolerably erect position, "I am going to make a what-d'ye-call-it."

Furious cheers greeted this announcement, while one of the hearers, carried away with enthusiasm at the prospect of listening to his friend's eloquence, discharged his revolver at the roof, scattering confusion amongst a legion of long-legged spiders that occupied the dusty cobwebs above our heads.

I was afraid the whole town would be up in arms at our carryings on, but they assured me that they all fired off their revolvers in that room and that nobody came near them, as they were so well known in the town.

"Gentlemen," continued Mr. Chillingworth, when order had been at length restored, "I've been thinking, that's what I've been doing. Now let's review the situation. Here we stand, a colony of English gentlemen: here we are, don't you know, far from our homes and country and all that sort of thing. What says the poet? I daresay some of you fellows remember the passage. But what for, I ask! What, gentlemen, is the object of our being here? That's just what I'm going to tell you, don't you know. We are here, gentlemen, to infuse a little of our Anglo-Saxon energy, and

all that sort of thing, into this dilapidated old tin-pot of a nation."

Here the orator was encouraged by a burst of applause.

"Now, gentlemen," he continued, "isn't it hard—devilish hard, don't you know, that so little is made of us? I feel it—I feel it, gentlemen; our lives are being frittered away. I don't know whether you fellows feel it. You see we ain't a melancholy lot. We're a glorious combination against the blue devils, that's what we are. Only sometimes I feel, don't you know, that all the rum in the place can't quite kill them. I can't help thinking of jolly days on the other side of the water. Now don't you fellows look at me as if you thought I was going to blubber. I'm not going to make such a confounded ass of myself, don't you know. But what I want you fellows to tell me is this: Are we to go on all our lives making beasts of ourselves, guzzling rum—I—I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I didn't mean to say that, really. Rum is about the only decent thing in this place. Rum keeps us alive. If any man says a word against rum, I'll call him an infernal ass. I meant to say the country, gentlemen—this rotten old country, don't you know. No cricket, no society, no Bass, no anything. Supposing we had gone to Canada with our —our capital and energies, wouldn't they have received us with open arms? And what's the reception we get here? Now, gentlemen, what I propose is this· let's protest. Let's get up a what-d'you-call-it to the thing they call a government. We'll state our case to the

thing, gentlemen; and we'll insist on it and be very firm; that's what we'll do, don't you know. Are we to live amongst these miserable monkeys and give them the benefit of our—our—yes, gentlemen, our capital and energies, and get nothing in return? No, no; we must let them know that we are not satisfied, that we will be very angry with them. That's about all I have to say, gentlemen."

Loud applause followed, during which the orator sat down rather suddenly on the floor. Then followed "Rule Britannia," everyone assisting with all the breath in his lungs to make night hideous.

When the song was finished the loud snoring of Captain Wriothesley became audible. He had begun to spread some rugs to lie on, but becoming hopelessly entangled in his bridle-reins, surcingle, and stirrup-straps, had fallen to sleep with his feet on his saddle and his head on the floor.

"Hallo, we can't have this!" shouted one of the fellows. "Let's wake old Cloud by firing at the wall over him and knocking some plaster on to his head. It'll be awful fun, you know."

Everybody was delighted with the proposal, except poor Chillingworth, who after delivering his speech had crept away on all fours into a corner, where he was sitting alone and looking very pale and miserable.

The firing now began, most of the bullets hitting the wall only a few inches above the recumbent Captain's head, scattering dust and bits of plaster over his purple face. I jumped up in alarm and rushed amongst them, telling them in my haste that they were too drunk to hold

their revolvers properly, and would kill their friend. My interference raised a loud, angry remonstrance, in the midst of which the Captain, who was lying in a most uncomfortable position, woke, and, struggling into a sitting posture, stared vacantly at us, his reins and straps wound like serpents about his neck and arms.

"What's all the row 'bout?" he demanded huskily. "Getting up rev'lution, I s'pose. A'right; only thing to do in this country. Only don't ask me to be pres'dent. Nor good enough. Goo' night, boys; don't cur my throat by mistake. Gor bless you all."

"No, no, don't go to sleep, Cloud," they shouted. "Lamb's the cause of all this. He says we're drunk—that's the way Lamb repays our hospitality. We were firing to wake you up, old Cap, to have a drink——"

"A drink—yes," assented the Captain hoarsely.

"And Lamb was afraid we would injure you. Tell him, old Cloud, whether you're afraid of your friends. Tell Lamb what you think of his conduct."

"Yes, I'll tell him," returned the Captain in his thick tones. "Lamb shan't interfere, gentlemen. But you know you took him in, didn't you now? And what was my opinion of him? It wasn't right of you fellows, was it, now? He couldn't be one of us, you know, could he now? I'll leave it to you, gentlemen; didn't I say the fellow was a cad? Why the devil doesn't he leave me alone then? I'll tell you what I'll do with Lamb, I'll punch his damned nose, don't you know."

And here the gallant gentleman attempted to rise, but his legs refused to assist him, and, tumbling back against

the wall, he was only able to glare at me out of his watery eyes.

I went up to him intending, I suppose, to punch *his* nose, but suddenly changing my mind I merely picked up my saddle and things, then left the room with a hearty curse on Çaptain Cloudesley Wriothesley, the evil genius, drunk or sober, of the colony of English gentlemen. I was no sooner outside the door than the joy they felt at being rid of me was expressed in loud shouts, clapping of hands, and a general discharge of firearms into the roof.

I spread my rugs out of doors and soliloquised myself to sleep. "And so ends," said I, fixing my somewhat drowsy eyes on the constellation of Orion, "adventure the second, or twenty-second—little does it matter about the exact number of them, since they all alike end in smoke —revolver smoke—or a flourish of knives and the shaking of dust from off my feet. And, perhaps, at this very moment Paquita, roused from light slumbers by the droning cry of the night-watchman under her window, puts out her arms to feel me, and sighs to find my place still vacant. What must I say to her? That I must change my name to Ernandes or Fernandes, or Blas or Chas, or Sandariaga, Gorostiaga, Madariaga, or any other *aga*, and conspire to overthrow the existing order of things. There is nothing else for me to do, since this Oriental world is indeed an oyster only a sharp sword will serve to open. As for arms and armies and military training, all that is quite unnecessary. One has only got to bring together a few ragged, dissatisfied men, and, taking horse, charge pell-mell into poor Mr. Chillingworth's dilapidated

old tin-pot. I almost feel like that unhappy gentleman to-night, ready to blubber. But, after all, my position is not quite so hopeless as his; I have no brutalised, purple-nosed Briton sitting like a nightmare on my chest, pressing the life out of me."

The shouts and choruses of the revellers grew fainter and fewer, and had almost ceased when I sank to sleep, lulled by a solitary tipsy voice droning out in a lugubrious key :—

We won't go—gome till morring.

CHAPTER VII

LOVE OF THE BEAUTIFUL

EARLY next morning I left Tolosa and travelled the whole day in a south-westerly direction. I did not hurry, but frequently dismounted to give my horse a sip of clear water and a taste of green herbage. I also called during the day at three or four estancia houses, but failed to hear anything that could be advantageous to me. In this way I covered about thirty-five miles of road, going always towards the eastern part of the Florida district in the heart of the country. About an hour before sunset I resolved to go no further that day; and I could not have hoped to find a nicer resting-place than the one now before me—a neat rancho with a wide corridor supported by wooden pillars, standing amidst a bower of fine old weeping willows. It was a calm, sunshiny afternoon, peace and quiet resting on everything, even bird and insect, for they were silent, or uttered only soft, subdued notes; and that modest lodge, with its rough stone walls and thatched roof, seemed to be in harmony with it all. It looked like the home of simple-minded pastoral people that had for their only world the grassy wilderness, watered by many clear streams, bounded ever by that far-off unbroken ring of

the horizon, and arched over with blue heaven, starry by night and filled by day with sweet sunshine.

On approaching the house I was agreeably disappointed at having no pack of loud-mouthed, ferocious dogs rushing forth to rend the presumptuous stranger to pieces, a thing one always expects. The only signs of life visible were a white-haired old man seated within the corridor smoking, and a few yards from it a young girl standing under a willow tree. But that girl was a picture for one to gaze long upon and carry about in his memory for a lifetime. Never had I beheld anything so exquisitely beautiful. It was not that kind of beauty so common in these countries, which bursts upon you like the sudden south-west wind called *pampero*, almost knocking the breath out of your body, then passing as suddenly away, leaving you with hair ruffled up and mouth full of dust. Its influence was more like that of the spring wind, which blows softly, scarcely fanning your cheek, yet infusing through all your system a delicious magical sensation like—like nothing else in earth or heaven. She was, I fancy, about fourteen years old, slender and graceful in figure, and with a marvellously clear white skin, on which this bright Oriental sun had not painted one freckle. Her features were, I think, the most perfect I have ever seen in any human being, and her golden brown hair hung in two heavy braids behind, almost to her knees. As I approached, she looked up to me out of sweet, grey-blue eyes; there was a bashful smile on her lips, but she did not move or speak. On the willow branch over her head were two young doves; they

were, it appeared, her pets, unable yet to fly, and she had placed them there. The little things had crept up just beyond her reach, and she was trying to get them by pulling the branch down towards her.

Leaving my horse I came to her side.

"I am tall, señorita," I said, "and can perhaps reach them."

She watched me with anxious interest while I gently pulled her birds from their perch and transferred them to her hands. Then she kissed them, well pleased, and with a gentle hesitation in her manner asked me in.

Under the corridor I made the acquaintance of her grandfather, the white-haired old man, and found him a person it was very easy to get on with, for he agreed readily with everything I said. Indeed, even before I could get a remark out he began eagerly assenting to it. There, too, I met the girl's mother, who was not at all like her beautiful daughter, but had black hair and eyes, and a brown skin, as most Spanish-American women have. Evidently the father is the white-skinned, golden-haired one, I thought. When the girl's brother came in, by-and-by, he unsaddled my horse and led him away to pasture; this boy was also dark, darker even than his mother.

The simple spontaneous kindness with which these people treated me had a flavour about it, the like of which I have seldom experienced elsewhere. It was not the common hospitality usually shown to a stranger, but a natural, unstrained kindness, such as they might be expected to show to a beloved brother or son who had

gone out from them in the morning and was now returned.

By-and-by the girl's father came in, and I was extremely surprised to find him a small, wrinkled, dark specimen, with jet-black, bead-like eyes and podgy nose, showing plainly enough that he had more than a dash of aboriginal Charrua blood in his veins. This upset my theory about the girl's fair skin and blue eyes; the little dark man was, however, quite as sweet-tempered as the others, for he came in, sat down and joined in the conversation, just as if I had been one of the family whom he had expected to find there. While I talked to these good people on simple pastoral matters, all the wickedness of Orientals—the throat-cutting war of Whites and Reds, and the unspeakable cruelties of the ten years' siege—were quite forgotten; I wished that I had been born amongst them and was one of them, not a weary, wandering Englishman, overburdened with the arms and armour of civilisation, and staggering along, like Atlas, with the weight of a kingdom on which the sun never sets on his shoulders.

By-and-by this good man, whose real name I never discovered, for his wife simply called him Batata (sweet potato), looking critically at his pretty girl, remarked: "Why have you decked yourself out like this, my daughter—it is not a Saint's day?"

His daughter indeed! I mentally ejaculated; she is more like the daughter of the evening star than of such a man. But his words were unreasonable, to say the least of it; for the sweet child, whose name was Margarita,

though wearing shoes, had no stockings on, while her dress—very clean, certainly—was a cotton print so faded that the pattern was quite undistinguishable. The only pretence of finery of any description was a narrow bit of blue ribbon tied about her lily-white neck. And yet had she been wearing richest silks and costliest gems she could not have blushed and smiled with a prettier confusion.

"We are expecting Uncle Anselmo this evening, papita," she replied.

"Leave the child, Batata," said the mother. "You know what a craze she has for Anselmo; when he comes she is always prepared to receive him like a queen."

This was really almost too much for me, and I was powerfully tempted to jump up and embrace the whole family on the spot. How sweet was this primitive simplicity of mind! Here, doubtlesss, was the one spot on the wide earth where the golden age still lingered, appearing like the last beams of the setting sun touching some prominent spot, when elsewhere all things are in shadow. Ah, why had fate led me into this sweet Arcadia, since I must presently leave it to go back to the dull world of toil and strife,

> That vain low strife
> Which makes men mad, the tug for wealth and power,
> The passions and the cares that wither life
> And waste its little hour?

Had it not been for the thought of Paquíta waiting for me over there in Montevideo I could have said, "O good friend Sweet Potato, and good friends all, let me remain

for ever with you under this roof, sharing your simple pleasures, and, wishing for nothing better, forget that great crowded world where all men are striving to conquer nature and death and to win fortune; until, having wasted their miserable lives in their vain endeavours, they drop down and the earth is shovelled over them!"

Shortly after sunset the expected Anselmo arrived to spend the night with his relations, and scarcely had he got down from his horse before Margarita was at his side to ask the avuncular blessing, at the same time raising his hand to her delicate lips. He gave his blessing, touching her golden hair; then she lifted her face bright with new happiness.

Anselmo was a fine specimen of the Oriental gaucho, dark and with good features, his hair and moustache intensely black. He wore costly clothes, while his whip-handle, the sheath of his long knife, and other things about him were of massive silver. Of silver also were his heavy spurs, the pommel of his saddle, his stirrups and the headstall of his bridle. He was a great talker; never, in fact, in the whole course of my varied experience have I encountered anyone who could pour out such an incessant stream of talk about small matters as this man. We all sat together in the social kitchen, sipping maté; I taking little part in the conversation, which was all about horses, scarcely even listening to what the others were saying. Reclining against the wall, I occupied myself agreeably watching the sweet face of Margarita, which in her happy excitement had become suffused with a delicate rosy colour. I have always had

a great love for the beautiful: sunsets, wild flowers, especially verbenas, so prettily called margaritas in this country; and beyond everything the rainbow spanning the vast gloomy heavens with its green and violet arch when the storm-cloud passes eastward over the wet sun-flushed earth. All these things have a singular fascination for my soul. But beauty when it presents itself in the human form is even more than these things. There is in it a magnetic power drawing my heart; a something that is not love, for how can a married man have a feeling like that towards anyone except his wife? No, it is not love, but a sacred ethereal kind of affection, resembling love only as the fragrance of violets resembles the taste of honey and the honey-comb.

At length, some time after supper, Margarita to my sorrow rose to retire, though not without first once more asking her uncle's blessing. After her departure from the kitchen, finding that the inexhaustible talking-machine Anselmo was still holding forth fresh as ever, I lit a cigar and prepared to listen.

CHAPTER VIII

MANUEL, ALSO CALLED THE FOX

WHEN I began to listen, it was a surprise to find that the subject of conversation was no longer the favourite one of horse-flesh, which had held undisputed sway the whole evening. Uncle Anselmo was just now expatiating on the merits of gin, a beverage for which he confessed to a special liking.

"Gin is, without doubt," said he, "the flower of all strong drinks. I have always maintained that it is incomparable. And for this reason I always keep a little of it in the house in a stone bottle; for, when I have taken my maté in the morning, and, after it, one or two or three or four sips of gin, I saddle my horse and go out with a tranquil stomach, feeling at peace with the whole world.

"Well, sirs, it happened that on the morning in question, I noticed that there was very little gin left in the bottle; for, though I could not see how much it contained, owing to its being of stone and not of glass, I judged from the manner in which I had to tip it upwards when pouring it out. In order to remember that I had to bring home some with me that day I tied a knot in my handkerchief; then, mounting my horse, I rode out

towards the side on which the sun sets, little expecting that anything unusual was going to happen to me that day. But thus it often is; for no man, however learned he may be and able to read the almanac, can tell what a day will bring forth."

Anselmo was so outrageously prosy, I felt strongly inclined to go to bed to dream of beautiful Margarita; but politeness forbade, and I was also somewhat curious to hear what extraordinary thing had happened to him on that very eventful day.

"It fortunately happened," continued Anselmo, "that I had that morning saddled the best of my cream-noses; for on that horse I could say without fear of contradiction, I am on horseback and not on foot. I called him Chingolo, a name which Manuel, also called the Fox, gave him, because he was a young horse of promise, able to fly with his rider. Manuel had nine horses—cream-noses every one—and how from being Manuel's they came to be mine I will tell you. He, poor man, had just lost all his money at cards—perhaps the money he lost was not much, but how he came to have any was a mystery to many. To me, however, it was no mystery, and when my cattle were slaughtered and had their hides stripped off by night, perhaps I could have gone to Justice—feeling like a blind man for something in the wrong place—and led her in the direction of the offender's house; but when one has it in his power to speak, knowing at the same time that his words will fall like a thunderbolt out of a blue sky upon a neighbour's dwelling, consuming it to ashes and killing all within it, why, sirs, in such a case the

good Christian prefers to hold his peace. For what has one man more than another that he should put himself in the place of Providence? We are all of flesh. True, some of us are only dog's flesh, fit for nothing; but to all of us the lash is painful, and where it rains blood will sprout. This, I say; but, remember, I say not that Manuel the Fox robbed me—for I would sully no man's reputation, even a robber's, or have anyone suffer on my account.

"Well, sirs, to go back to what I was saying, Manuel lost everything; then his wife fell ill with fever; and what was there left for him but to turn his horses into money? In this way it came about that I bought the cream-noses and paid him fifty dollars for them. True, the horses were young and sound, nevertheless it was a great price, and I paid it not without first weighing the matter well in my own mind. For in things of this nature if a person makes not his reckoning beforehand, where, let me ask, sirs, will he find himself at the year's end? The devil will take him with all the cattle he inherited from his fathers, or got together by his own proper abilities and industry.

"For you see the thing is this. I have a poor head for figures; all other kinds of knowledge come easy to me, but how to calculate readily has never yet found an entrance into my head. At the same time, whenever I find it impossible to make out my accounts, or settle what to do, I have only to take the matter to bed with me and lie awake thinking it over. For when I do that, I rise next morning feeling free and refreshed, like a man that

has just eaten a water-melon; for what I have to do and how it is to be done is all as plain to my sight as this maté-cup I hold in my hand.

"In this difficulty I therefore resolved to take the subject of the horses to bed with me, and to say, 'Here I have you and you shall not escape from me.' But about supper-time Manuel came in to molest me, and sat in the kitchen with a sad face, like a prisoner under sentence of death.

"'If Providence is angry against the entire human race,' said he, 'and is anxious to make an example, I know not for what reason so harmless and obscure a person as I am should have been selected.'

"'What would you have, Manuel?' I replied. 'Wise men tell us that Providence sends us misfortunes for our good.'

"'True, I agree with you,' he said. 'It is not for me to doubt it, for what can be said of that soldier who finds fault with the measures of his commander? But you know, Anselmo, the man I am, and it is bitter that these troubles should fall on one who has never offended except in being always poor.'

"'The vulture,' said I, 'ever preys on the weak and ailing.'

"'First I lose everything,' he continued, 'then this woman must fall ill of a calenture; and now I am forced to believe that even my credit is gone, since I cannot borrow the money I require. Those who knew me best have suddenly become strangers.'

"'When a man is down,' said I, 'the very dogs will scratch up the dust against him.'

"'True,' said Manuel; 'and since these calamities fell on me, what has become of the friendships that were so many? For nothing has a worse smell, or stinks more, than poverty, so that all men when they behold it cover up their faces or fly from such a pestilence.'

"'You speak the truth, Manuel,' I returned; 'but say not all men, for who knows—there being so many souls in the world—whether you may not be doing injustice to someone.'

"'I say it not of you,' he replied. 'On the contrary, if any person has had compassion on me it is you; and this I say, not in your presence only, but publicly proclaim it to all men.'

"Words only were these. 'And now,' he continued, 'my cards oblige me to part with my horses for money; therefore I come this evening to learn your decision.'

"'Manuel,' said I, 'I am a man of few words, as you know, and straightforward, therefore you need not have used compliments, and before saying this to have said so many things; for in this you do not treat me as a friend.'

"'You say well,' he replied; 'but I love not to dismount before checking my horse and taking my toes from the stirrups.'

"'That is only as it should be,' said I; 'nevertheless, when you come to a friend's house, you need not alight at such a distance from the gate.'

"'For what you say, I thank you,' he answered. 'My faults are more numerous than the spots on the wild cat, but not amongst them is precipitancy.'

"'That is what I like,' said I; 'for I do not love to go

about like a drunk man embracing strangers. But our acquaintance is not of yesterday, for we have looked into and know each other, even to the bowels and to the marrow in the bones. Why, then, should we meet as strangers, since we have never had a difference, or any occasion to speak ill of each other?'

"'And how should we speak ill,' replied Manuel, 'since it has never entered into either of us, even in a dream, to do the other an injury? Some there are, who, loving me badly, would blow up your head like a bladder with lies if they could, laying I know not what things to my charge, when—heaven knows—they themselves are perhaps the authors of all they so readily blame me for.'

"'If you speak,' said I, 'of the cattle I have lost, trouble not yourself about such trifles; for if those who speak evil of you, only because they themselves are evil, were listening, they might say, This man begins to defend himself when no one has so much as thought of drawing against him.'

"'True, there is nothing they will not say of me,' said Manuel; 'therefore I am dumb, for nothing is to be gained by speaking. They have already judged me, and no man wishes to be made a liar.'

"'As for me,' I said, 'I never doubted you, knowing you to be a man, honest, sober, and diligent. If in anything you had given offence I should have told you of it, so great is my frankness towards all men.'

"'All that you tell me I firmly believe,' said he, 'for I know that you are not one that wears a mask like others. Therefore, relying on your great openness in all things, I

come to you about these horses; for I love not dealing with those who shake you out a whole bushel of chaff for every grain of corn.'

"'But, Manuel,' said I, 'you know that I am not made of gold, and that the mines of Peru were not left to me for an inheritance. You ask a high price for your horses.'

"'I do not deny it,' he replied. 'But you are not one to stop your ears against reason and poverty when they speak. My horses are my only wealth and happiness, and I have no glory but them.'

"'Frankly then,' I answered, 'to-morrow I will tell you yes or no.'

"'Let it be as you say; but, friend, if you will close with me to-night I will abate something from the price.'

"'If you wish to abate anything,' said I, 'let it be to-morrow, for I have accounts to make up to-night and a thousand things to think of.'

"After that Manuel got on to his horse and rode away. It was black and rainy, but he had never needed moon or lantern to find what he sought by night, whether his own house, or a fat cow—also his own, perhaps.

"Then I went to bed. The first question I asked myself, when I had blown out the candle, was, Are there fat wethers enough in my flock to pay for the cream-noses? Then I asked, How many fat wethers will it take at the price Don Sebastian—a miserly cheat be it said in passing—offers me a head for them to make up the amount I require?

"That was the question; but you see, friends, I could not answer it. At length, about midnight, I resolved to

light the candle and get an ear of maize; for by putting the grains into small heaps, each heap the price of a wether, then counting the whole, I could get to know what I wanted.

"The idea was good. I was feeling under my pillow for the matches to strike a light when I suddenly remembered that all the grain had been given to the poultry. No matter, said I to myself, I have been spared the trouble of getting out of bed for nothing. Why, it was only yesterday, said I, still thinking about the maize, that Pascuala, the cook, said to me when she put my dinner before me, 'Master, when are you going to buy some grain for the fowls? How can you expect the soup to be good when there is not even an egg to put in it? Then there is the black cock with the twisted toe—one of the second brood the spotted hen raised last summer, though the foxes carried off no less than three hens from the very bushes where she was sitting—he has been going round with drooping wings all day, so that I verily believe he is going to have the pip. And if any epidemic comes amongst the fowls, as there was in neighbour Gumesinda's the year before last, you may be sure it will only be for want of corn. And the strangest thing is, and it is quite true, though you may doubt it, for neighbour Gumesinda told me only yesterday when she came to ask me for some parsley, because, as you know very well, her own was all rooted up when the pigs broke into her garden last October; well, sir, she says the epidemic which swept off twenty-seven of her best fowls in one week began by a black cock with a broken toe,

just like ours, beginning to droop its wings as if it had the pip.'

"'May all the demons take this woman!' I cried, throwing down the spoon I had been using, 'with her chatter about eggs and pip and neighbour Gumesinda, and I know not what besides! Do you think I have nothing to do but to gallop about the country looking for maize, when it is not to be had for its weight in gold at this season, and all because a sickly spotted hen is likely to have the pip?'

"'I have said no such thing,' retorted Pascuala, raising her voice as women do. 'Either you are not paying proper attention to what I am telling you, or you pretend not to understand me. For I never said the spotted hen was likely to have the pip; and if she is the fattest fowl in all this neighbourhood you may thank me, after the Virgin, for it, as neighbour Gumesinda often says, for I never fail to give her chopped meat three times a day; and that is why she is never out of the kitchen, so that even the cats are afraid to come into the house, for she flies like a fury into their faces. But you are always laying hold of my words by the heels; and if I said anything at all about pip, it was not the spotted hen, but the black cock with the twisted toe, I said was likely to have it.'

"'To the devil with your cock and your hen!' I shouted, rising in haste from my chair, for my patience was all gone and the woman was driving me crazy with her story of a twisted toe and what neighbour Gumesinda said. 'And may all the curses fall on that same woman, who is

always full as a gazette of her neighbours' affairs! I know well what the parsley is she comes to gather in my garden. It is not enough that she goes about the country giving importance to the couplets I sang to Montenegro's daughter, when I danced with her at Cousin Teodoro's dance after the cattle-marking, when, heaven knows, I never cared the blue end of a finger-nail for that girl. But things have now come to a pretty pass when even a chicken with a broken toe cannot be indisposed in my house without neighbour Gumesinda thrusting her beak into the matter!'

"Such anger did I feel at Pascuala when I remembered these things and other things besides, for there is no end to that woman's tongue, that I could have thrown the dish of meat at her head.

"Just then, while occupied with these thoughts, I fell asleep. Next morning I got up, and without heating my head any more I bought the horses and paid Manuel his price. For there is in me this excellent gift, when I am puzzled in mind and in doubt about anything, night makes everything plain to me and I rise refreshed and with my determination formed."

Here ended Anselmo's story, without one word about those marvellous matters he had set out to tell. They had all been clean forgotten. He began to make a cigarette, and, fearing that he was about to launch forth on some fresh subject, I hastily bade good night and retreated to my bed.

CHAPTER IX

THE BOTANIST AND THE SIMPLE NATIVE

EARLY next morning Anselmo took his departure, but I was up in time to say good-bye to the worthy spinner of interminable yarns leading to nothing. I was, in fact, engaged in performing my morning ablutions in a large wooden bucket under the willows when he placed himself in the saddle; then, after carefully arranging the drapery of his picturesque garments, he trotted gently away, the picture of a man with a tranquil stomach and at peace with the whole world, even neighbour Gumesinda included.

I had spent a somewhat restless night, strange to say, for my hospitable hostess had provided me with a deliciously soft bed, a very unusual luxury in the Banda Oriental, and when I plunged into it there were no hungry bedfellows waiting my advent within its mysterious folds. I thought about the pastoral simplicity of the lives and character of the good people slumbering near me; and that inconsequent story of Anselmo's about Manuel and Pascuala caused me to laugh several times. Finally my thoughts, which had been roaming around in a wild, uncertain manner, like rooks "blown about the windy skies," settled quietly down to the consideration of that

beautiful anomaly, that mystery of mysteries, the white-faced Margarita. For how, in the name of heredity, had she got there? Whence that pearly skin and lithesome form; the proud sweet mouth, the nose that Phidias might have taken for a model; the clear, spiritual, sapphire eyes, and the wealth of silky hair, that if unbound would cover her as with a garment of surpassing beauty? With such a problem vexing my curious brain, what sleep could a philosopher get?

When Batata saw me making preparations for departure, he warmly pressed me to stay to breakfast. I consented at once, for, after all, the more leisurely one does a thing the sooner will it be accomplished—especially in the Banda Orientál. One breakfasts here at noon, so that I had plenty of time to see, and renew my pleasure in seeing, pretty Margarita.

In the course of the morning we had a visitor; a traveller who arrived on a tired horse, and who slightly knew my host Batata, having, I was told, called at the house on former occasions. Marcos Marcó was his name; a tall sallow-faced individual about fifty years old, slightly grey, very dirty, and wearing threadbare gaucho garments. He had a slouching gait and manner, and a patient, waiting hungry animal expression of face. Very, very keen were his eyes, and I detected him several times watching me narrowly.

Leaving this Oriental tramp in conversation with Batata, who with misplaced kindness had offered to provide him with a fresh horse, I went out for a walk before breakfast. During my walk, which was along a tiny

stream at the foot of the hill on which the house stood, I found a very lovely bell-shaped flower of a delicate rose-colour. I plucked it carefully and took it back with me, thinking it just possible that I might give it to Margarita should she happen to be in the way. On my return to the house I found the traveller sitting by himself under the corridor, engaged in mending some portion of his dilapidated horse-gear, and sat down to have a chat with him. A clever bee will always be able to extract honey enough to reward him from any flower, and so I did not hesitate tackling this outwardly very unpromising subject.

"And so you are an Englishman," he remarked, after we had had some conversation; and I, of course, replied in the affirmative.

"What a strange thing!" he said. "And you are fond of gathering pretty flowers?" he continued, with a glance at my treasure.

"All flowers are pretty," I replied.

"But surely, señor, some are prettier than others. Perhaps you have observed a particularly pretty one growing in these parts—the white margarita?"

Margarita is the Oriental vernacular for verbena; the fragrant white variety is quite common in the country; so that I was justified in ignoring the fellow's rather impudent meaning. Assuming as wooden an expression as I could, I replied, "Yes, I have often observed the flower you speak of; it is fragrant, and to my mind surpasses in beauty the scarlet and purple varieties. But you must know, my friend, that I am a botanist, that is, a student of plants, and they are all equally interesting to me."

This astonished him; and pleased with the interest he appeared to take in the subject, I explained, in simple language, the principles on which a classification of plants is founded, telling him about that *lingua franca* by means of which all the botanists in the world of all nations are able to converse together about plants. From this somewhat dry subject I launched into the more fascinating one of the physiology of plants. "Now look at this," I continued, and with my penknife I carefully dissected the flower in my hand, for it was evident that I could not now give it to Margarita without exposing myself to remarks. I then proceeded to explain to him the beautiful complex structure by means of which this campanula fertilises itself.

He listened in wonder, exhausting all the Spanish and Oriental equivalents of such expressions as "Dear me!" "How extraordinary!" "Lawks a mussy!" "You don't say so!" I finished my lecture, satisfied that my superior intellect had baffled the rude creature; then, tossing away the fragments of the flower I had sacrificed, I restored the penknife to my pocket.

"These are matters we do not often hear about in the Banda Oriental," he said. "But the English know everything—even the secrets of a flower. They are also able to do most things. Did you ever, sir botanist, take part in acting a comedy?"

After all, I had wasted my flower and scientific knowledge on the animal for nothing! "Yes, I have!" I replied rather angrily; then, suddenly remembering Eyebrows' teaching, I added, "and in tragedy also."

"Is that so?" he exclaimed. "How amused the spectators must have been! Well, we can all have our fill of fighting presently, for I see the *White Flower* coming this way to tell us that breakfast is ready. Batata's roast beef will give something for our knives to do; I only wish we had one of his own floury namesakes to eat with it."

I swallowed my resentment, and when Margarita came to us looked up into her matchless face with a smile, then rose to follow her into the kitchen.

CHAPTER X

MATTERS RELATING TO THE REPUBLIC

AFTER breakfast I bade a reluctant good-bye to my kind entertainers, took a last longing lingering look at lovely Margarita, and mounted my horse. Scarcely was I in the saddle before Marcos Marcó, who was also about to resume his journey on the fresh horse he had borrowed, remarked—

"You are travelling to Montevideo, good friend; I am also going in that direction, and will take you the shortest way."

"The road will show me the way," I rejoined curtly.

"The road," he said, "is like a lawsuit; round-about, full of puddles and pitfalls, and long to travel. It is only meant to be used by old half-blind men and drivers of bullock carts."

I hesitated about accepting the guidance of this strange fellow, who appeared to have a ready wit under his heavy slouching exterior. The mixed contempt and humility in his speech every time he addressed me gave me an uncomfortable sensation; then his poverty-stricken appearance and his furtive glances filled me with suspicion. I looked at my host, who was standing near, thinking to take my cue from the expression of his face; but it was

only a stolid Oriental face that revealed nothing. An ancient rule in whist is to play trumps when in doubt; now my rule of action is, when two courses are open to me and I am in doubt, to take the bolder one. Acting on this principle, I determined to go with Marcos, and accordingly we rode forth together.

My guide soon struck away across country, leading me wide of the public road, through such lonely places that I at length began to suspect him of some sinister design against my person, since I had no property worth taking. Presently he surprised me by saying—"You were right, my young friend, in casting away idle fears when you accepted my company. Why do you let them return to trouble your peace? Men of your blood have never inflicted injuries on me that cry out for vengeance. Can I make myself young again by shedding your life, or would there be any profit in changing these rags I now wear for your garments, which are also dusty and frayed? No, no, sir Englishman, this dress of patience and suffering and exile, my covering by day and my bed by night, must soon be changed for brighter garments than you are wearing."

This speech relieved me sensibly, and I smiled at the poor devil's ambitious dream of wearing a soldier's greasy red jacket; for I supposed that that was what his words meant. Still, his "shortest way" to Montevideo continued to puzzle me considerably. For two or three hours we had been riding nearly parallel to a range of hills, or cuchilla, extending away on our left hand towards the south-east. But we were gradually drawing nearer to it,

and apparently going purposely out of our way only to traverse a most lonely and difficult country. The few estancia-houses we passed, perched on the highest points of the great sweep of moor-like country on our right, appeared to be very far away. Where we rode there were no habitations, not even a shepherd's hovel; the dry, stony soil was thinly covered with a forest of dwarf thorn trees, and a scanty pasturage burnt to a rust-brown colour by the summer heats; and out of this arid region rose the hills, their brown, woodless sides looking strangely gaunt and desolate in the fierce noonday sun.

Pointing to the open country on our right, where the blue gleam of a river was visible, I said—"My friend, I assure you, I fear nothing, but I cannot understand why you keep near these hills when the valley over there would have been pleasanter for ourselves, and easier for our horses."

"I do nothing without a reason," he said, with a strange smile. "The water you see over there is the Rio de las Canas (River of grey hairs), and those who go down into its valley grow old before their time."

Occasionally talking, but oftener silent, we jogged on till about three o'clock in the afternoon, when suddenly as we were skirting a patch of scraggy woodland, a troop of six armed men emerged from it, and wheeling about came directly towards us. A glance was enough to tell us that they were soldiers or mounted policemen, scouring the country in search of recruits, or, in other words, of deserters, skulking criminals, and vagabonds of all descriptions. I had nothing to fear from them, but an exclama-

tion of rage escaped my companion's lips, and turning to him I perceived that his face was of the whiteness of ashes. I laughed, for revenge is sweet, and I still smarted a little at his contemptuous treatment of me earlier in the day.

"Is your fear so great?" I said.

"You do not know what you say, boy!" he returned fiercely. "When you have passed through as much hell-fire as I have and have rested as sweetly with a corpse for a pillow, you will learn to curb your impertinent tongue when you address a man."

An angry retort was on my lips, but a glance at his face prevented me from uttering it—it was, in its expression, the face of a wild animal worried by dogs.

In another moment the men had cantered up to us, and one, their commander, addressing me, asked to see my passport.

"I carry no passport," I replied. "My nationality is a sufficient protection, for I am an Englishman as you can see."

"We have only your word for that," said the man. "There is an English consul in the capital, who provides English subjects with passports for their protection in this country. If you have not got one you must suffer for it, and no one but yourself is to blame. I see in you only a young man complete in all his members, and of such the republic is in need. Your speech is also like that of one who came into the world under this sky. You must go with us."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," I returned.

"Do not say such a thing, master," said Marcos, astonishing me very much with the change in his tone and manner. "You know I warned you a month ago that it was imprudent to leave Montevideo without our passports. This officer is only obeying the orders he has received; still he might see that we are only what we represent ourselves to be."

"Oh!" exclaimed the officer, turning to Marcos, "you are also an Englishman unprovided with a passport, I suppose? You might at least have supplied yourself with a couple of blue crockery eyes and a yellow beard for your greater safety."

"I am only a poor son of the soil," said Marcos meekly. "This young Englishman is looking for an estancia to buy, and I came as his attendant from the capital. We were very careless not to get our passports before starting."

"Then, of course, this young man has plenty of money in his pocket?" said the officer.

I did not relish the lies Marcos had taken upon himself to tell about me, but did not quite know what the consequences of contradicting them might be. I therefore replied that I was not so foolish as to travel in a country like the Banda Oriental with money on my person. "To pay for bread and cheese till I reach my destination is about as much as I have," I added.

"The government of this country is a generous one," said the officer sarcastically, "and will pay for all the bread and cheese you will require. It will also provide you with beef. You must now come with me to the Juzgado de las Cuevas, both of you."

Seeing no help for it, we accompanied our captors at a swinging gallop over a rough, undulating country, and in about an hour and a half reached Las Cuevas, a dirty, miserable-looking village, composed of a few ranchos built round a large plaza overgrown with weeds. On one side stood the church, on the other a square stone building with a flagstaff before it. This was the official building of the Juez de Paz, or rural magistrate; just now, however, it was closed, and with no sign of life about it except an old dead-and-alive-looking man sitting against the closed door, with his bare, mahogany-coloured legs stretched out in the hot sunshine.

"This is a very fine thing!" exclaimed the officer with a curse. "I feel very much inclined to let the men go."

"You will lose nothing by doing so, except, perhaps, a headache," said Marcos.

"Hold your tongue till your advice is asked!" retorted the officer, thoroughly out of temper.

"Lock them up in the calaboso till the Juez comes to-morrow, Lieutenant," suggested the old man by the door, speaking through a bushy white beard and a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Do you not know that the door is broken, old fool?" said the officer. "Lock them up! Here I am neglecting my own affairs to serve the state, and this is how I am treated. We must now take them to the Juez at his own house and let him look after them. Come on, boys."

We were then conducted out of Las Cuevas to a distance of about two miles, where the Señor Juez resided

in the bosom of his family. His private residence was a very dirty, neglected-looking estancia-house, with a great many dogs, fowls, and children about. We dismounted and were immediately taken into a large room, where the magistrate sat at a table on which lay a great number of papers—goodness knows what they were about. The Juez was a little hatchet-faced man, with bristly grey whiskers, standing out like a cat's moustache, and angry eyes—or, rather, with one angry eye, for over the other a cotton handkerchief was tied. No sooner had we all entered than a hen, leading a brood of a dozen half-grown chickens, rushed into the room after us, the chickens instantly distributing themselves about the floor in quest of crumbs, while the mother, more ambitious, flew on the table, scattering the papers right and left with the wind she created.

"A thousand demons take the fowls!" cried the Juez, starting up in a fury. "Man, go and bring your mistress here this instant. I command her to come."

This order was obeyed by the person who had ushered us in, a greasy-looking, swarthy-faced individual, in threadbare military clothes; and in two or three minutes he returned, followed by a very fat, slatternly woman, looking very good-tempered, however, who immediately subsided, quite exhausted, into a chair.

"What is it, Fernando?" she panted.

"What is it? How can you have the courage to ask such a question, Toribia? Look at the confusion your pestilent fowls are creating amongst my papers—papers that concern the safety of the republic! Woman, what

measures are you going to take to stop this before I have your fowls all killed on the spot?"

"What can I do, Fernando?—they are hungry, I suppose. I thought you wanted to ask my advice about these prisoners—poor fellows! and here you are with your hens."

Her placid manner acted like oil on the fire of his wrath. He stormed about the room, kicking over chairs, and hurling rulers and paper-weights at the birds, apparently with the most deadly intentions, but with shockingly bad aim—shouting, shaking his fist at his wife, and even threatening to commit her for contempt of court when she laughed. At last, after a great deal of trouble, the fowls were all got out, and the servant placed to guard the door, with strict orders to decapitate the first chicken that should attempt to enter and disturb the proceedings.

Order being restored, the Juez lit a cigarette and began to smooth his ruffled feathers. "Proceed," he said to the officer, from his seat at the table.

"Sir," said the officer, "in pursuance of my duty I have taken in charge these two strangers, who are unprovided with passports or documents of any description to corroborate their statements. According to their story, the young man is an English millionaire going about the country buying up estates, while the other man is his servant. There are twenty-five reasons for disbelieving their story, but I have not sufficient time to impart them to you now. Having found the doors of the Juzgado closed, I have brought these men here with great in-

convenience to myself; and I am now only waiting to have this business despatched without further delay, so that I may have a little time left to devote to my private affairs."

"Address not me in this imperative manner, sir officer!" exclaimed the Juez, his anger blazing out afresh. "Do you imagine, sir, that I have no private interests; that the state feeds and clothes my wife and children? No, sir, I am the servant of the republic, not the slave; and I beg to remind you that official business must be transacted during the proper hours and at the proper place."

"Sir Juez," said the officer, "it is my opinion that a civil magistrate ought never to have any part in matters which more properly come under the military authorities. However, since these things are differently arranged, and I am compelled to come with my reports to you in the first place, I am only here to know, without entering into any discussion concerning your position in the republic, what is to be done with these two prisoners I have brought before you."

"Done with them! Send them to the devil! cut their throats; let them go; do what you like, since you are responsible, not I. And be sure, sir officer, I shall not fail to report your insubordinate language to your superiors."

"Your threats do not alarm me," said the officer; "for one cannot be guilty of insubordination towards a person one is not bound to obey. And now, sirs," he added, turning to us, "I have been advised to release you; you are free to continue your journey."

Marcos rose with alacrity.

"Man, sit down!" yelled the irate magistrate, and poor Marcos, thoroughly crestfallen, sat down again. "Sir Lieutenant," continued the fierce old man, "you are dismissed from further attendance here. The republic you profess to serve would perhaps be just as well off without your valuable aid. Go, sir, to attend to your private affairs, and leave your men here to execute my commands."

The officer rose, and having made a profound and sarcastic bow, turned on his heel and left the room.

"Take these two prisoners to the stocks," continued the little despot. "I will examine them to-morrow."

Marcos was first marched out of the room by two of the soldiers; for it happened that an outhouse on the place was provided with the usual wooden arrangement to make captives secure for the night. But when the other men took me by the arms, I recovered from the astonishment the magistrate's order had produced in me, and shook them roughly aside. "Señor Juez," I said, addressing him, "let me beg you to consider what you are doing. Surely my accent is enough to satisfy any reasonable person that I am not a native of this country. I am willing to remain in your custody, or to go wherever you like to send me; but your men shall tear me to pieces before making me suffer the indignity of the stocks. If you maltreat me in any way, I warn you that the government you serve will only censure, and perhaps ruin you, for your imprudent zeal."

Before he could reply, his fat spouse, who had apparently

taken a great fancy to me, interposed on my behalf, and persuaded the little savage to spare me.

"Very well," he said, "consider yourself a guest in my house for the present; if you are telling the truth about yourself, a day's detention cannot hurt you."

I was then conducted by my kind intercessor into the kitchen, where we all sat down to partake of maté and talk ourselves into good humour.

I began to feel rather sorry for poor Marcos, for even a worthless vagabond, such as he appeared to be, becomes an object of compassion when misfortune overtakes him, and I asked permission to see him. This was readily granted. I found him confined in a large empty room built apart from the house; he had been provided with a maté-cup and a kettle of hot water, and was sipping his bitter beverage with an air of stoical indifference. His legs, confined in the stocks, were thrust straight out before him; but I suppose he was accustomed to uncomfortable positions, for he did not seem to mind it much. After sympathising with him in a general way, I asked him whether he could really sleep in that position.

"No," he replied with indifference. "But do you know I do not mind about being taken. They will send me to the comandancia, I suppose, and after a few days liberate me. I am a good workman on horseback, and there will not be wanting some estanciero in need of hands to get me out. Will you do me one small service friend, before you go to your bed?"

"Yes, certainly, if I can," I answered.

He laughed slightly and looked at me with a strange keen glitter in his eyes; then, taking my hand, he gave it a powerful grip. "No, no, my friend, I am not going to trouble you to do anything for me," he said. "I have the devil's temper, and to-day, in a moment of rage, I insulted you. It therefore surprised me when you came here and spoke kindly to me. I desired to know whether that feeling was only on the surface; since the men one meets with are often like horned cattle. When one falls, his companions of the pasture-ground remember only his past offences, and make haste to gore him."

His manner surprised me; he did not now seem like the Marcos Marcó I had travelled with that day. Touched with his words, I sat down on the stocks facing him, and begged him to tell me what I could do for him.

"Well, friend," said he, "you see the stocks are fastened with a padlock. If you will get the key, and take me out, I will sleep well; then in the morning, before the old one-eyed lunatic is up, you can come and turn the key in the lock again. Nobody will be the wiser."

"And you are not thinking of escaping?" I said.

"I have not even the faintest wish to escape," he replied.

"You could not escape if you did," I said, "for the room would be locked, of course. But if I were disposed to do what you ask, how could I get the key?"

"That is an easy matter," said Marcos. "Ask the good señora to let you have it. Did I not notice her eyes dwelling lovingly on your face—for, doubtless, you reminded her of some absent relative, a favourite nephew,

perhaps. She would not deny you anything in reason; and a kindness, friend, even to the poorest man, is never thrown away."

"I will think about it," I said, and shortly after that I left him.

It was a sultry evening, and the close, smoky atmosphere of the kitchen becoming unendurable, I went out and sat down on a log of wood out of doors. Here the old Juez, in his character of amiable host, came and discoursed for half an hour on lofty matters relating to the republic. Presently his wife came out, and, declaring that the evening air would have an injurious effect on his inflamed eye, persuaded him to go indoors. Then she subsided into a place at my side, and began to talk about Fernando's dreadful temper and the many cares of her life.

"What a very serious young man you are!" she remarked, changing her tone somewhat abruptly. "Do you keep all your gay and pleasant speeches for the young and pretty señoritas?"

"Ah, señora, you are yourself young and beautiful in my eyes," I replied; "but I have no heart to be gay when my poor fellow-traveller is fastened in the stocks, where your cruel husband would also have confined me but for your timely intervention. You are so kind-hearted, cannot you have his poor tired legs taken out in order that he may also rest properly to-night?"

"Ah, little friend," she returned, "I could not attempt such a thing. Fernando is a monster of cruelty, and would immediately put out my eyes without remorse.

Poor me, what I have to endure!"—and here she placed her fat hand on mine.

I drew my hand away somewhat coldly; a born diplomatist could not have managed the thing better.

"Madam," I said, "you are amusing yourself at my expense. When you have done me a great favour, will you now deny me this small thing? If your husband is so terrible a despot, surely you can do this without letting him know! Let me get my poor Marcos out of the stocks, and I give you my word of honour that the Juez will never hear of it, for I will be up early to turn the key in the lock before he is out of his bed."

"And what will my reward be?" she asked, again putting her hand on mine.

"The deep gratitude and devotion of my heart," I returned, this time without withdrawing my hand.

"Can I refuse anything to my sweet boy?" said she. "After supper I shall slip the key into your hand; I am going now to get it from his room. Before Fernando retires, ask to see your Marcos, to take him a rug, or some tobacco or something; and do not let the servant see what you do, for he will be at the door waiting to lock it when you come out."

After supper the promised key was secretly conveyed to me, and I had not the least difficulty in liberating my friend in misfortune. Luckily the man who took me to Marcos left us alone for some time, and I related my conversation with the fat woman.

He jumped up, and, seizing my hand, wrung it till I almost screamed with pain.

"My good friend," he said, "you have a noble, generous soul, and have done me the greatest service it is possible for one man to render to another. You have, in fact, now placed me in a position to—enjoy my night's rest. Good night, and may Heaven's angels put it in my power to reward you at some future time!"

The fellow was overdoing it a little, I thought; then, when I had seen him safely locked up for the night, I walked back to the kitchen slowly and very thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XI

THE WOMAN AND THE SERPENT

I WALKED thoughtfully back because, after rendering that unimportant service to Marcos, I began to experience sundry qualms of conscience and inward questionings concerning the strict morality of the whole proceeding. Allowing that I had done something very kind, charitable, and altogether praiseworthy in getting the poor fellow's unfortunate feet out of the stocks, did all that justify the cajolery I had practised to attain my object? Or, to put it briefly in the old familiar way, Does the end sanctify the means? Assuredly it does in some cases, very easy to be imagined. Let us suppose that I have a beloved friend, an ailing person of a nervous, delicate organisation, who has taken it into his poor cracked brains that he is going to expire at the stroke of twelve on a given night. Without consulting the authorities on ethical questions I should, in such a case, flit about his room secretly manipulating his time-pieces, till I had advanced them a whole hour, and then, just before the stroke of midnight, triumphantly produce my watch and inform him that death had failed to keep the appointment. Such an acted lie as that would weigh nothing on the conscience of any man. The fact of the

matter is, the circumstances must always be considered and every case judged on its own particular merits. Now this affair of getting the key was not one for me to judge, since I had been a chief actor in it, but rather for some acute and learned casuist. I therefore made a mental note of it with the intention of putting it impartially before the first person of that description I should meet. Having thus disposed of a troublesome matter, I felt greatly relieved in mind and turned into the kitchen once more. I had scarcely sat down, however, before I found that one disagreeable consequence of my performance—the fat señora's claim on my undying devotion and gratitude—had yet to be faced. She greeted my entrance with an effusive smile; and the sweetest smiles of some people one meets are less endurable than their black looks. In self-defence I assumed as drowsy and vacant an expression as I could summon on the instant to a countenance by nature almost too ingenuous. I pretended not to hear or to misunderstand everything that was said to me; finally I grew so sleepy that I was several times on the point of falling off my chair, then, after each extravagant nod, I would start up and stare vacantly around me. My grim little host could scarcely conceal a quiet smile, for never had he seen a person so outrageously sleepy before. At length he mercifully remarked that I seemed fatigued and advised me to retire. Very gladly I made my exit, followed in my retreat from the kitchen by a pair of sad, reproachful eyes.

I slept soundly enough in the comfortable bed, which my obese Gulnare had provided for me, until the numerous

cocks of the establishment woke me shortly after daybreak with their crowing. Remembering that I had to secure Marcos in the stocks before the irascible little magistrate should appear on the scene, I rose and hastily dressed myself. I found the greasy man of the brass buttons already in the kitchen sipping his matutinal maté-amargo, and asked him to lend me the key of the prisoner's room; for this was what I had been instructed to do by the señora. He got up and went with me to open the door himself, not caring, I suppose, to trust me with the key. When he threw the door open we stood silently gazing for some time into the empty apartment. The prisoner had vanished, and a large hole cut in the thatch of the roof showed how and where he had made his exit. I felt very much exasperated at the shabby trick the fellow had played on us, on me especially, for I was in a measure responsible for him. Fortunately the man who opened the door never suspected me of being an accomplice, but merely remarked that the stocks had evidently been left unlocked by the soldiers the evening before, so that it was not strange the prisoner had made his escape.

When the other members of the household got up the matter was discussed with little excitement or even interest, and I soon concluded that the secret of the escape would remain between the lady of the house and myself. She watched for an opportunity to speak to me alone, then, shaking her fat forefinger at me in playful anger, whispered, "Ah, deceiver, you planned it all with him last evening and only made me your instrument!"

"Señora," I protested with dignity, "I assure you, on the word of honour of an Englishman, I never suspected the man had any intention of escaping. I am very angry it has happened."

"What do you suppose I care about his escaping?" she replied laughingly. "For your sake, sweet friend, I would gladly open the doors of every prison in the Banda if I had the power."

"Ah, how you flatter! But I must now go to your husband to learn from him what he intends doing with the prisoner who has not attempted to escape."

With this excuse I got away from her.

The wretched little Juez, when I spoke to him, put me off with a number of vague, meaningless phrases about his responsible position, the peculiar nature of his functions, and the unsettled state of the republic—as if it had ever known or was ever likely to know any other state! He then mounted his horse and rode away to Las Cuevas, leaving me with that dreadful woman; and I verily believe that in doing so he was only carrying out her private instructions. The only comfort he gave me was the promise he made before going that a communication respecting me would be forwarded to the Comandante of the district in the course of the day, which would probably result in my being passed on to that functionary. In the meanwhile he begged me to make free use of his house and everything in it. Of course, the misguided little wretch had no intention of throwing his fat wife at my head; still I had no doubt that it was she who inspired these complimentary phrases, telling him, per-

haps, that he would lose nothing by a courteous treatment of the "English millionaire."

When he rode away he left me sitting on the gate, feeling very much disgusted, and almost wishing that, like Marcos Marcó, I had run away during the night. Never had I taken so sudden and violent a dislike to anything as I then and there did to that estancia, where I was an honoured, albeit a compulsory guest. The hot, brilliant morning sun shone down on the discoloured thatch and mud-plastered walls of the sordid-looking building, while all about wherever I cast my eyes they rested on weeds, old bones, broken bottles, and other rubbish, eloquent witnesses of the dirty, idle, thriftless character of the inmates. Meanwhile my sweet, angelic child-wife, with her violet eyes dim with tears, was waiting for me far away in Montevideo, wondering at my long absence, and even now perhaps shading her face with her lily hand and looking out on the white dusty road watching for my arrival! And here I was compelled to sit, idly swinging my legs on the gate, because that abominable fat woman had taken a fancy to keep me by her! Feeling mad with indignation, I suddenly jumped down from the gate with an exclamation not intended for ears polite, causing my hostess to jump also and utter a scream; for there she was (confound her!) standing just behind me.

"The Saints defend me!" she exclaimed, recovering herself and laughing; "what made you startle me so?"

I apologised for the strong expression I had used; then added, "Señora, I am a young man full of energy and accustomed to take a great deal of exercise every day, and

I am getting very impatient sitting here basking in the sunshine, like a turtle on a bank of mud."

"Why then do you not take a walk?" she said, with kind concern.

I said I would gladly do so, and thanked her for the permission; then she immediately offered to accompany me. I protested very ungallantly that I was a fast walker, and reminded her that the sun was excessively hot, and I should also have liked to add that she was excessively fat. She replied that it did not matter; so polite a person as myself would know how to accommodate his pace to that of his companion. Unable to shake her off, I started for my walk in a somewhat unamiable mood, the stout lady resolutely trudging on at my side, perspiring abundantly. Our path led us down to a little cañada, or valley, where the ground was moist and abounding with numerous pretty flowers and feathery grasses, very refreshing to look at after leaving the parched yellow ground about the estancia house.

"You seem to be very fond of flowers," observed my companion. "Let me help you gather them. To whom will you give your nosegay when it is made?"

"Señora," I replied, vexed at her trivial chatter, "I will give it to the——" I had almost said to the devil, when a piercing scream she uttered suddenly arrested the rude speech on my lips.

Her fright had been caused by a pretty little snake, about eighteen inches long, which she had seen gliding away at her feet. And no wonder it glided away from her with all the speed it was capable of, for how gigantic

and deformed a monster that fat woman must have seemed to it! The terror of a timid little child at the sight of a hippopotamus, robed in flowing bed-curtains and walking erect on its hind legs, would perhaps be comparable to the panic possessing the shallow brain of the poor speckled thing when that huge woman came striding over it.

First I laughed, and then, seeing that she was about to throw herself for protection like a mountain of flesh upon me, I turned and ran after the snake—for I had observed that it belonged to a harmless species, one of the innocuous Coronella genus—and I was anxious to annoy the woman. I captured it in a moment; then, with the poor frightened creature struggling in my hand and winding itself about my wrist, I walked back to her.

"Did you ever see such lovely colours?" I cried. "Look at the delicate primrose yellow on its neck, deepening into vivid crimson on the belly. Talk of flowers and butterflies! And its eyes are bright as two small diamonds—look closely at them, señora, for they are well worth your admiration."

But she only turned and fled away screaming at my approach, and at last finding that I would not obey her and drop the terrible reptile, she left me in a towering rage and went back to the house by herself.

After that I continued my walk in peace amongst the flowers; but my little speckled captive had served me so well that I would not release it. It occurred to me that if I kept it on my person it might serve as a sort of talisman

to protect me from the disagreeable attentions of the señora. Finding that it was a very sly little snakey, and, like Marcos Marcó in captivity, full of subtle deceit, I put it into my hat, which, when firmly pressed on to my head, left no opening for the little arrowy head to insinuate itself through. After spending two or three hours botanising in the cañada I returned to the house. I was in the kitchen refreshing myself with a bitter maté, when my hostess came in beaming with smiles, for she had, I suppose, forgiven me by this time. I politely rose and removed my hat. Unfortunately I had forgotten the snake, when out it dropped on the floor; then followed screams, confusion, and scuttling out of the kitchen by madame, children, and servants. After that I was compelled to carry the snake out and give it back its liberty, which no doubt tasted very sweet to it after its close confinement. On my return to the house, one of the servants informed me that the señora was too much offended to sit in the same room with me again, so that I was obliged to have my breakfast alone; and for the remainder of the time during which I was a prisoner, I was avoided by everyone (except Brass Buttons, who appeared indifferent to everything on earth), as if I had been a leper or a dangerous lunatic. They thought, perhaps, that I still had other reptiles concealed about my person.

Of course, one always expects to find a cruel, unreasoning prejudice against snakes amongst ignorant people, but I never knew before to what ridiculous lengths it will carry them. The prejudice makes me angry, but on this

occasion it had a use, for it enabled me to pass the day unmolested.

In the evening the Juez returned, and I soon heard him loud in a stormy altercation with his wife. Perhaps she wanted him to have me decapitated. How it ended I cannot say; but when I saw him his manner towards me was freezing, and he retired without giving me an opportunity of speaking to him.

Next morning I got up resolved not to be put off any longer. Something would have to be done, or I would know the reason why. On stepping out I was very much surprised to see my horse standing saddled at the gate. I went into the kitchen and asked Brass Buttons, the only person up, what it meant.

"Who knows?" he returned, giving me a maté. "Perhaps the Juez desires you to leave the house before he is up."

"What did he say?" I demanded.

"Say? Nothing—what should he say?"

"But you saddled the horse, I suppose?"

"Of course. Who else would do it?"

"Were you told to do so by the Juez?"

"Told? Why should he tell me?"

"How then am I to know that he wishes me to leave his beautiful house?" I asked, getting angry.

"The question!" he returned, shrugging his shoulders. "How do you know when it is going to rain?"

Finding there was nothing more to be got out of the fellow, I finished taking maté, lit a cigar, and left the house. It was a lovely morning, without a cloud, and the

heavy dew sparkled on the grass like drops of rain. What a pleasant thing it was to be able to ride forth again free to go where I liked!

And so ends my snake-story, which is perhaps not very interesting; but it is true, and therefore has one advantage over all other snake-stories told by travellers.

CHAPTER XII

CHILDREN IN THE FOREST

BEFORE leaving the magistrate's estancia I had made up my mind to return by the shortest route, and as quickly as possible, to Montevideo; and that morning, mounted on a well-rested horse, I covered a great deal of ground. By twelve o'clock, when I stopped to rest my horse and get some refreshment at a wayside *pulpería*, I had got over about eight leagues. This was travelling at an imprudent pace, of course; but in the Banda Oriental it is so easy to pick up a fresh horse that one becomes somewhat reckless. My journey that morning had taken me over the eastern portion of the Durazno district, and I was everywhere charmed with the beauty of the country, though it was still very dry, the grass on the higher lands being burnt to various shades of yellow and brown. Now, however, the summer heats were over, for the time was near the end of February; the temperature, without being oppressive, was deliciously warm, so that travelling on horseback was delightful. I might fill dozens of pages with descriptions of pretty bits of country I passed that day, but must plead guilty of an unconquerable aversion to this kind of writing. After this candid confession, I hope the reader will not quarrel with me for the omission;

besides, anyone who cares for these things, and knows how evanescent are the impressions left by word pictures on the mind, can sail the seas and gallop round the world to see them all for himself. It is not, however, every wanderer from England—I blush while saying it—who can make himself familiar with the home habits, the ways of thought and speech, of a distant people. Bid me discourse of lowly valley, lofty height, of barren waste, shady wood, or cooling stream where I have drunk and been refreshed; but all these places, pleasant or dreary, must be in the kingdom called the heart.

After getting some information about the country I had to traverse from the *pulpero*, who told me that I would probably reach the river Yí before evening, I resumed my journey. About four o'clock in the afternoon I came to an extensive wood of thorn trees, of which the *pulpero* had spoken, and, in accordance with his instructions, I skirted it on the eastern side. The trees were not large, but there was an engaging wildness about this forest, full of the musical chatter of birds, which tempted me to alight from my horse and rest for a hour in the shade. Taking the bit from his mouth to let him feed, I threw myself down on the dry grass under a clump of shady thorns, and for half an hour watched the sparkling sunlight falling through the foliage overhead, and listened to the feathered people that came about me, loudly chirping, apparently curious to know what object had brought me to their haunts. Then I began to think of all the people I had recently mixed with; the angry magistrate and his fat wife—horrid woman!—and Marcos

Marcó, that shabby rascal, rose up before me to pass quickly away, and once more I was face to face with that lovely mystery Margarita. In imagination I put forth my hands to take hers and drew her towards me so as to look more closely into her eyes, vainly questioning them as to their pure sapphire hue. Then I imagined, or dreamt, that with trembling fingers I unbraided her hair to let it fall like a splendid golden mantle over her mean dress, and asked her how she came to possess that garment of glory. The sweet, grave, child lips smiled, but returned no answer. Then a shadowy face seemed to shape itself dimly against the green curtain of foliage, and, looking over the fair girl's shoulder, gaze sadly into my eyes. It was the face of Paquita. Ah, sweet wife, never let the green-eyed monster trouble the peace of your heart! Know that the practical Saxon mind of your husband is puzzling itself over a purely scientific problem, that this surpassingly fair child interests me only because her fairness seems to upset all physiological laws. I was, in fact, just sinking to sleep at this moment when the shrill note of a trumpet blown close by and followed by loud shouts from several voices made me spring instantly to my feet. A storm of answering shouts came from another quarter of the wood, then followed profound silence. Presently the trumpet sounded again, making me feel very much alarmed. My first impulse was to spring on to my horse and ride away for dear life; but, on second thoughts, I concluded that it would be safer to remain concealed amongst the trees, as by leaving them I should only reveal myself to the robbers or rebels. or

whatever they were. I bridled my horse so as to be ready to run, then drew him into a close thicket of dark-foliaged bushes and fastened him there. The silence that had fallen on the wood continued, and at last, unable to bear the suspense longer, I began to make my way cautiously, revolver in hand, towards the point the sounds had proceeded from. Stealing softly through the bushes and trees where they grew near together, I came at length in sight of an open piece of ground, about two or three hundred yards wide, and overgrown with grass. Near its border on one side I was amazed to see a group of about a dozen boys, their ages ranging from about ten to fifteen, all standing perfectly motionless. One of them held a trumpet in his hand, and they all wore red handkerchiefs or rags tied round their heads. Suddenly, while I crouched amongst the leafage watching them, a shrill note sounded from the opposite side of the open space, and another troop of boys wearing white on their heads burst from the trees and advanced with loud shouts of *vivas* and *mueras* towards the middle of the ground. Again the red heads sounded their trumpet and went out boldly to meet the new-comers. As the two bands approached each other, each led by a big boy, who turned at intervals, and with many wild gestures addressed his followers, apparently to encourage them, I was amazed to see them all suddenly draw out long knives, such as the native horsemen usually wear, and rush furiously together. In a moment they were mingled together in a desperate fight, uttering the most horrible yells, their long weapons glittering in the sunshine as they brandished them about.

With such fury did they fight that in a few moments all the combatants lay stretched out on the grass, excepting three boys wearing the red badges. One of these blood-thirsty young miscreants then snatched up the trumpet and blew a victorious blast, while the other two shrieked an accompaniment of *vivas* and *mueras*. While they were thus occupied one of the white-headed boys struggled to his feet, and, snatching up a knife, charged the three reds with desperate courage. Had I not been perfectly paralysed with amazement at what I had witnessed, I should then have rushed out to aid this boy in his forlorn attempt; but in an instant his three foes were on him and dragged him down to the ground. Two of them then held him fast by the legs and arms, the other raised his long knife and was just about to plunge it in the struggling captive's breast, when, uttering a loud yell, I sprang up and rushed at them. Instantly they started up and fled screaming towards the trees in the greatest terror; and then, most wonderful thing of all, the dead boys all came to life, and, springing to their feet, fled from me after the others. This brought me to a stand, when, seeing that one of the boys limped painfully after his companions, hopping on one leg, I made a sudden dash and captured him before he could reach the shelter of the trees.

"O señor, do not kill me!" he pleaded, bursting into tears.

"I have no wish to kill you, you unspeakable young miscreant, but I think I ought to thrash you," I answered, for, though greatly relieved at the turn things had taken,

I was excessively annoyed at having experienced all those sensations of blood-curdling horror for nothing.

"We were only playing at Whites and Reds," he pleaded.

I then made him sit down and tell me all about this singular game.

None of the boys lived very near, he said; some of them came a distance of several leagues, and they had selected this locality for their sports on account of its seclusion, for they did not like to be found out. Their game was a mimic war of Whites and Reds, manœuvres, surprises, skirmishes, throat-cutting, and all.

I pitied the young patriot at the last, for he had sprained his ankle badly and could scarcely walk, and so assisted him to the spot where his horse was hidden; then having helped him to mount and given him a cigarette, for which he had the impudence to ask me, I laughingly bade him good-bye. I went back to look for my own horse after that, beginning to feel very much amused at the whole thing; but alas! my steed was gone. The young scoundrels had stolen him, to revenge themselves on me, I suppose, for disturbing them; and to relieve me from all doubt in the matter they left two bits of rag, one white and the other red, attached to the branch I had fastened the bridle to. For some time I wandered about the wood, and even shouted aloud in the wild hope that the young fiends were not going to carry things so far as to leave me without a horse in that solitary place. Nothing could I see or hear of them, however, and as it was getting late and I was becoming desperately hungry

and thirsty, I resolved to go in search of some habitation.

On emerging from the forest I found the adjacent plain covered with cattle quietly grazing. Any attempt to pass through the herd would have been almost certain death, as these more than half-wild beasts will always take revenge on their master man when they catch him dismounted in the open. As they were coming up from the direction of the river, and were slowly grazing past the wood, I resolved to wait for them to pass on before leaving my concealment. I sat down and tried to be patient, but the brutes were in no hurry, and went on skirting the wood at a snail's pace. It was about six o'clock before the last stragglers had left, and then I ventured out from my hiding-place, hungry as a wolf and afraid of being overtaken by night before finding any human habitation. I had left the trees half a mile behind me and was walking hurriedly along towards the valley of the Yí, when passing over a hillock, I suddenly found myself in sight of a bull resting on the grass and quietly chewing his cud. Unfortunately the brute saw me at the same moment and immediately stood up. He was, I think, about three or four years old, and a bull of that age is even more dangerous than an older one; for he is quite as truculent as the other and far more active. There was no refuge of any kind near, and I knew very well that to attempt to escape by running would only increase my danger, so after gazing at him for a few moments I assumed an easy unconcerned manner and walked on; but he was not going to be taken in that way and began

to follow me. Then for the first, and I devoutly hope for the last, time in my life I was compelled to resort to the gaucho plan, and casting myself face downwards on the earth, lay there simulating death. It is a miserable, dangerous expedient, but in the circumstances I found myself, the only one offering a chance of escape from a very terrible death. In a few moments I heard his heavy tramp, then felt him sniffing me all over. After that he tried unsuccessfully to roll me over, in order to study my face, I suppose. It was horrible to endure the prods he gave me and lie still, but after a while he grew quieter and contented himself by simply keeping guard over me; occasionally smelling at my head, then turning round to smell at my heels. Probably his theory was, if he had one, that I had fainted with fear at the sight of him and would recover presently, but he was not quite sure at which end of me returning life would first show itself. About once in every five or six minutes he seemed to get impatient, and then he would paw me with his heavy hoof, uttering a low hoarse moaning, spattering me with froth from his mouth; but as he showed no disposition to leave, I at last resolved to try a very bold experiment, for my position was becoming unendurable. I waited till the brute's head was turned from me, then worked my hand cautiously down to my revolver; but before I had quite drawn it, he noticed the movement and wheeled swiftly round, kicking my legs as he did so. Just as he brought his head round close to mine, I discharged the weapon in his face, and the sudden explosion so terrified him that he turned tail and fled, never paus-

ing in his lumbering gallop till he was out of sight. It was a glorious victory; and though I could scarcely stand on my legs at first, so stiff and bruised did I feel all over, I laughed with joy, and even sent another bullet whizzing after the retreating monster, accompanying the discharge with a wild yell of triumph.

After that I proceeded without further interruption on my walk, and, had I not felt so ravenously hungry and so sore where the bull had trod on me or prodded me with his horns, the walk would have been very enjoyable, for I was now approaching the Yí. The ground grew moist and green, and flowers abounded, many of them new to me and so lovely and fragrant that in my admiration for them I almost forgot my pain. The sun went down, but no house appeared in sight. Over the western heavens flamed the brilliant hues of the afterglow, and from the long grass came the sad monotonous trill of some night insect. Troops of hooded gulls flew by me on their way from their feeding grounds to the water, uttering their long hoarse laughter-like cries. How buoyant and happy they seemed, flying with their stomachs full to their rest; while I, dismounted and supperless, dragged painfully on like a gull that had been left behind with a broken wing. Presently, through the purple and saffron-hued vapours in the western sky, the evening star appeared, large and luminous, the herald of swift-coming darkness; and then, weary, bruised, hungry, baffled, and despondent, I sat down to meditate on my forlorn position.

CHAPTER XIII

BARKING DOGS AND SHOUTING REBELS

I SAT there till it was very dark, and the longer I sat the colder and stiffer I grew, yet I felt no disposition to walk further. At length a large owl, flapping down close to my head, gave utterance to a long hiss, followed by a sharp clicking sound, ending with a sudden loud, laugh-like cry. The nearness of it startled me, and looking up, I saw a twinkling yellow light gleam for a moment across the wide, black plain, then disappear. A few fireflies were flitting about the grass, but I felt sure the gleam just witnessed proceeded from a fire; and after vainly trying to catch sight of it again from my seat on the ground, I rose and walked on, keeping before me a particular star shining directly over the spot where that transient glimmer had appeared. Presently, to my great joy, I spied it again in the same place, and felt convinced that it was the gleam of firelight shining from the open door or window of some rancho or estancia house. With renewed hope and energy I hastened on, the light increasing in brightness as I progressed; and, after half an hour's brisk walking, I found myself approaching a human dwelling of some kind. I could make out a dark mass of trees and bushes, a long, low house,

and, nearer to me, a corral, or cattle-pen, of tall upright posts. Now, however, when a refuge seemed so close, the fear of the terrible, savage dogs kept on most of these cattle-breeding establishments made me hesitate. Unless I wished to run the risk of being shot, it was necessary to shout loudly to make my approach known, yet by shouting I would inevitably bring a pack of huge, frantic dogs upon me; and the horns of the angry bull I had encountered were less terrible to contemplate than the fangs of these powerful truculent brutes. I sat down on the ground to consider the position, and presently heard the clatter of approaching hoofs. Immediately afterwards three men rode past me, but did not see me, for I was crouching down behind some scrubby bushes. When the horsemen approached the house the dogs rushed forth to assail them, and their loud, fierce barking, and the wild shouts of some person from the house calling them off, were enough to make a dismounted man nervous. However, now was my only chance, and, starting up, I hurried on towards the noise. As I passed the corral the brutes became aware of my approach, and instantly turned their attention on me. I wildly shouted "*Ave Maria*," then, revolver in hand, stood awaiting the onset; but when they were near enough for me to see that the pack was composed of eight or ten huge yellow mastiff-like brutes my courage failed, and I fled to the corral, where, with an agility surpassing that of a wild cat, so great was my terror, I climbed up a post and placed myself beyond their reach. With the dogs furiously barking under me, I renewed my shouts of "*Ave Maria*" —the proper thing

to do when you approach a strange house in these pious latitudes. After some time the men approached—four of them—and asked me who I was and what I did there. I gave an account of myself, then asked whether it would be safe for me to descend. The master of the house took the hint, and drove his faithful protectors off, after which I came down from my uncomfortable perch.

He was a tall, well-made, but rather fierce-looking gaucho, with keen black eyes, and a heavy black beard. He seemed suspicious of me—a very unusual thing in a native's house, and asked me a great many searching questions; and finally, still with some reluctance in his manner, he invited me into the kitchen. There I found a big fire blazing merrily on the raised clay hearth in the centre of the large room, and seated near it an old grey-haired woman, a middle-aged, tall, dark-skinned dame in a purple dress—my host's wife; a pale, pretty young woman, about sixteen years old, and a little girl. When I sat down my host began once more questioning me; but he apologised for doing so, saying that my arrival on foot seemed a very extraordinary circumstance. I told them how I had lost my horse, saddle, and poncho in the wood, and then related my encounter with the bull. They listened to it all with very grave faces, but I am sure it was as good as a comedy to them. Don Sinforiano Alday, the owner of the place and my questioner, made me take off my coat to exhibit the bruises the bull's hoofs had inflicted on my arms and shoulders. He was anxious, even after that, to know something more about me, and so to satisfy him I gave him a brief account of some

of my adventures in the country, down to my arrest with Marcos Marcó, and how that plausible gentleman had made his escape from the magistrate's house. That made them all laugh, and the three men I had seen arrive, and who appeared to be casual visitors, became very friendly, frequently passing me the rum bottle with which they were provided.

After sipping maté and rum for half an hour we settled down to discuss a plentiful supper of roast and boiled beef and mutton, with great basins of well-seasoned broth to wash it down. I consumed an amazing quantity of meat, as much, in fact, as any gaucho there; and to eat as much as one of these men at a sitting is a feat for an Englishman to boast about. Supper done, I lit a cigar and leant back against the wall enjoying many delightful sensations all together—warmth, rest, and hunger satisfied, and the subtle fragrance of that friend and comforter, divine tobacco. On the further side of the room my host was meanwhile talking to the other men in low tones. Occasional glances in my direction seemed to show that they still harboured some suspicion of me, or that they had some grave matters to converse about unsuitable for a stranger to hear.

At length Alday rose and addressed me. "Señor, if you are ready to rest I will now conduct you to another room, where you can have some rugs and ponchos to make a bed with."

"If my presence here is not inconvenient," I returned, "I would rather remain and smoke by the fire."

"You see, señor," he said, "I have arranged to meet

some neighbours and friends, who are coming here to discuss matters of importance with me. I am even now expecting their arrival, and the presence of a stranger would scarcely allow us to talk freely over our affairs."

"Since you wish it, I will go to any part of the house you may think proper to put me in," I returned.

I rose, not very cheerfully, I must say, from my comfortable seat before the fire, to follow him out, when the tramp of galloping horses came to our ears.

"Follow me this way—quick," exclaimed my impatient conductor; but just as I reached the door about a dozen mounted men dashed up close to us and burst forth in a perfect storm of yells. Instantly all those who were in the kitchen sprang to their feet uttering loud exclamations and looking greatly excited. Then came from the mounted men another wild outburst as they all yelled together, "*Viva el General Santa Coloma—viv—a.*"

The other three men then rushed from the kitchen, and in excited tones began to ask if anything fresh had happened. Meanwhile, I was left standing at the door by myself. The women appeared almost as excited as the men, except the girl, who had glanced at me with shy compassion in her large, dark eyes when I had been roused from my seat by the fire. Taking advantage of the general excitement, I now repaid that kindly look with one of admiration. She was a quiet, bashful girl, her pale face crowned with a profusion of black hair; and while she stood there waiting, apparently unconcerned by the hubbub outside, she looked strangely pretty, her home-made cotton gown, of limp and scanty

material, clinging closely to her limbs so as to display her slender, graceful form to the best advantage. Presently, seeing me looking at her she came near, and touching my arm in passing told me in a whisper to go back to my seat by the fire. I gladly obeyed her, for my curiosity was now thoroughly aroused, and I wished to know the meaning of this outcry which had thrown these phlegmatic gauchos into such a frenzied state of excitement. It looked rather like a political row—but of General Santa Coloma I had never heard, and it seemed curious that a name so seldom mentioned should be the rallying cry of revolutionists.

In a few minutes the men all streamed back into the kitchen. Then the master of the house, Alday, his face on fire with emotion, thrust himself into the midst of the crowd.

"Boys, are you mad!" he cried. "Do you not see a stranger here? What is the meaning of all this outcry if nothing new has happened?"

A roar of laughter from the new-comers greeted this outburst, after which they raised another yell of "*Viva Santa Coloma!*"

Alday became furious. "Speak, madmen!" he shouted; "tell me, in God's name, what has happened—or do you wish to ruin everything with your imprudence?"

"Listen, Alday," replied one of the men, "and know how little we need fear the presence of a stranger. Santa Coloma, the hope of Uruguay, the saviour of his country, who will shortly deliver us out of the power of Colorado assassins and pirates—Santa Coloma has come! He is

here in our midst; he has seized on El Molino del Yí, and has raised the standard of revolt against the infamous government of Montevideo! *Viva Santa Coloma!*"

Alday flung his hat off and, falling on his knees, remained for some moments in silent prayer, his hands clasped before him. The others all snatched off their hats and stood silent, grouped about him. Then he stood up, and all together joined in a *viva*, which far surpassed in its deafening power their previous performances.

My host now appeared to be almost beside himself with excitement.

"What," he cried, "my General come! Do you tell me that Santa Coloma has come? O, friends, the great God has remembered our suffering country at last! He has grown weary of looking on man's injustice, the persecutions, the bloodshed, the cruelties that have almost driven us mad. I cannot realise it! Let me go to my General that these eyes that have watched for his coming may see him and rejoice. I cannot wait for daylight—this very night must I ride to El Molino, that I may see him and touch him with my hands, and know that it is not a dream."

His words were welcomed with a shout of applause, and the other men all immediately announced their intention to accompany him to El Molino, a small town on the Yí some leagues distant.

Some of the men now went out to catch fresh horses, while Alday busied himself in bringing out a store of old broadswords and carbines from their concealment in some other part of the house. The men, talking excitedly

together, occupied themselves in scouring and sharpening the rusty weapons, while the women cooked a fresh supply of meat for the last comers; and in the meantime I was permitted to remain unnoticed by the fire, smoking peacefully.

CHAPTER XIV

MAIDS OF FANCY: MAIDS OF YÍ

THE girl I have mentioned, whose name was Monica, and the child, called Anita, were the only persons there besides myself who were not carried away by the warlike enthusiasm of the moment. Monica, silent, pale, almost apathetic, was occupied serving maté to the numerous guests; while the child, when the shouting and excitement was at its height, appeared greatly terrified, and clung to Alday's wife, trembling and crying piteously. No notice was taken of the poor little thing, and at length she crept away into a corner to conceal herself behind a faggot of wood. Her hiding-place was close to my seat, and after a little coaxing I induced her to leave it and come to me. She was a most forlorn little thing, with a white, thin face and large, dark, pathetic eyes. Her mean little cotton frock only reached to her knees, and her little legs and feet were bare. Her age was seven or eight; she was an orphan, and Alday's wife, having no children of her own, was bringing her up, or rather permitting her to grow up under her roof. I drew her to me, and tried to soothe her tremors and get her to talk. Little by little she gained confidence, and began to reply to my questions; then I learnt that she was a

little shepherdess, although so young, and spent most of the time every day in following the flock about on her pony. Her pony and the girl Monica, who was some relation—cousin, the child called her—were the two beings she seemed to have the greatest affection for.

"And when you slip off, how do you get on again?" I asked.

"Little pony is tame, and I never fall off," she said. "Sometimes I get off, then I climb on again."

"And what do you do all day long—talk and play?"

"I talk to my doll; I take it on the pony when I go with the sheep."

"Is your doll very pretty, Anita?"

No answer.

"Will you let me see your doll, Anita? I know I shall like your doll, because I like you."

She gave me an anxious look. Evidently doll was a very precious being and had not met with proper appreciation. After a little nervous fidgeting she left me and crept out of the room; then presently she came back, apparently trying to screen something from the vulgar gaze in her scanty little dress. It was her wonderful doll—the dear companion of her rambles and rides. With fear and trembling she allowed me to take it into my hands. It was, or consisted of, the fore-foot of a sheep, cut off at the knee; on the top of the knee part a little wooden ball wrapped in a white rag represented the head, and it was dressed in a piece of red flannel—a satyr-like doll with one hairy leg and a cloven foot. I praised its pleasing countenance, its pretty gown and

dainty little boots; and all I said sounded very precious to Anita, filling her with emotions of the liveliest pleasure.

"And do you never play with the dogs and cats and little lambs?" I asked.

"Not with the dogs and cats. When I see a very little lamb asleep, I get down and go softly, softly and catch it. It tries to get away; then I put my finger in its mouth, and it sucks, and sucks; then it runs away."

"And what do you like best to eat?"

"Sugar. When uncle buys sugar, aunt gives me a lump. I make doll eat some, and bite off one small piece and put it in pony's mouth."

"Which would you rather have, Anita—a great many lumps of sugar, or a beautiful string of beads, or a little girl to play with?"

This question was rather too much for her neglected little brain, which had fed itself with such simple fare; so I was obliged to put it in various ways, and at last, when she understood that only one of the three things could be chosen, she decided in favour of a little girl to play with.

Then I asked her if she liked to hear stories; this also puzzled her, and after some cross-questioning I discovered that she had never heard a story, and did not know what it meant.

"Listen, Anita, and I will tell you a story," I said. "Have you seen the white mist over the Yí in the morning—a light white mist that flies away when the sun gets hot?"

Yes, she often saw the white mist in the morning, she told me.

"Then I will tell you a story about the white mist and a little girl named Alma.

"Little Alma lived close to the river Yí, but far, far from here, beyond the trees and beyond the blue hills, for the Yí is a very long river. She lived with her grandmother and with six uncles, all big tall men with long beards; and they always talked about wars, and cattle, and horse-racing, and a great many other important things that Alma could not understand. There was no one to talk to Alma and for Alma to talk to or to play with. And when she went out of the house where all the big people were talking, she heard the cocks crowing, the dogs barking, the birds singing, the sheep bleating, and the trees rustling their leaves over her head, and she could not understand one word of all they said. At last, having no one to play with or talk to, she sat down and began to cry. Now, it happened that near the spot where she sat there was an old black woman wearing a red shawl, who was gathering sticks for the fire, and she asked Alma why she cried.

"'Because I have no one to talk to and play with,' said Alma. Then the old black woman drew a long brass pin out of her shawl and pricked Alma's tongue with it, for she made Alma hold it out to be pricked.

"'Now,' said the old woman, 'you can go and play and talk with the dogs, cats, birds, and trees, for you will understand all they say, and they will understand all you say.'

"Alma was very glad, and ran home as fast as she could to talk to the cat.

"'Come, cat, let us talk and play together,' she said.

"'Oh no,' said the cat. 'I am very busy watching a little bird, so you must go away and play with little Niebla down by the river.'

"Then the cat ran away among the weeds and left her. The dogs also refused to play when she went to them; for they had to watch the house and bark at strangers. Then they also told her to go and play with little Niebla down by the river. Then Alma ran out and caught a little duckling, a soft little thing that looked like a ball of yellow cotton, and said—

"'Now, little duck, let us talk and play.'

"But the duckling only struggled to get away and screamed, 'Oh, mamma, mamma, come and take me away from Alma!'

"Then the old duck came rushing up, and said—

"'Alma, let my child alone: and if you want to play, go and play with Niebla down by the river. A nice thing to catch my duckie in your hands—what next, I wonder!'

"So she let the duckling go, and at last she said, 'Yes, I will go and play with Niebla down by the river.'

"She waited till she saw the white mist, and then ran all the way to the Yí, and stood still on the green bank close by the water with the white mist all round her. By-and-by she saw a beautiful little child come flying towards her in the white mist. The child came and stood on the green bank and looked at Alma. Very, very pretty she was; and she wore a white dress—whiter than

milk, whiter than foam, and all embroidered with purple flowers; she had also white silk stockings and scarlet shoes, bright as scarlet verbenas. Her hair was long and fluffy, and shone like gold, and round her neck she had a string of big gold beads. Then Alma said, 'Oh, beautiful little girl, what is your name?' to which the little girl answered—

"'Niebla.'

"'Will you talk to me and play with me?' said Alma.

"'Oh no,' said Niebla, 'how can I play with a little girl dressed as you are and with bare feet?'

"For you know poor Alma only wore a little old frock that came down to her knees, and she had no shoes and stockings on. Then little Niebla rose up and floated away, away from the bank and down the river, and at last, when she was quite out of sight in the white mist, Alma began to cry. When it got very hot she went and sat down, still crying, under the trees; there were two very big willow trees growing near the river. By-and-by the leaves rustled in the wind and the trees began talking to each other, and Alma understood everything they said.

"'Is it going to rain, do you think?' said one tree.

"'Yes, I think it will—some day,' said the other.

"'There are no clouds,' said the first tree.

"'No, there are no clouds to-day, but there were some the day before yesterday,' said the other.

"'Have you got any nests in your branches?' said the first tree.

"'Yes, one,' said the other. 'It was made by a little yellow bird, and there are five speckled eggs in it.'

"Then the first tree said, 'There is little Alma sitting in our shade; do you know why she is crying, neighbour?'

"The other tree answered, 'Yes, it is because she has no one to play with. Little Niebla by the river refused to play with her because she is not beautifully dressed.'

"Then the first tree said, 'Ah, she ought to go and ask the fox for some pretty clothes to wear. The fox always keeps a great store of pretty things in her hole.'

"Alma had listened to every word of this conversation. She remembered that a fox lived on the hillside not far off; for she had often seen it sitting in the sunshine with its little ones playing round it and pulling their mother's tail in fun. So Alma got up and ran till she found the hole, and putting her head down it she cried out, 'Fox! Fox!' But the fox seemed cross and only answered without coming out, 'Go away, Alma, and talk to little Niebla. I am busy getting dinner for my children and have no time to talk to you now.'

"Then Alma cried, 'Oh, Fox, Niebla will not play with me because I have no pretty things to wear. Oh, Fox, will you give me a nice dress and shoes and stockings and a string of beads?'

"After a little while the fox came out of its hole with a big bundle done up in a red cotton handkerchief, and said, 'Here are the things, Alma, and I hope they will fit you. But you know, Alma, you really ought not to come at this time of day, for I am very busy just now cooking the dinner—an armadillo roasted and a couple of partridges stewed with rice, and a little omelette of turkeys'

eggs. I mean plovers' eggs, of course; I never touch turkeys' eggs.'

"Alma said she was very sorry to give so much trouble.

"'Oh, never mind,' said the fox. 'How is your grandmother?'

"She is very well, thank you,' said Alma, 'but she has a bad headache.'

"'I am very sorry to hear it,' said the fox. 'Tell her to stick two fresh dock leaves on her temples, and to drink a little weak tea made of knot-grass, and on no account to go out in the hot sun. I should like to go and see her, only I do not like the dogs being always about the house. Give her my best respects. And now run home, Alma, and try on the things, and when you are passing this way you can bring me back the handkerchief, as I always tie my face up in it when I have the toothache.'

"Alma thanked the fox very much and ran home as fast as she could, and when the bundle was opened she found in it a beautiful white dress, embroidered with purple flowers, a pair of scarlet shoes, silk stockings, and a string of great golden beads. They all fitted her very well; and next day when the white mist was on the Yí she dressed herself in her beautiful clothes and went down to the river. By-and-by little Niebla came flying along, and when she saw Alma she came and kissed her and took her by the hand. All the morning they played and talked together, gathering flowers and running races over the green sward; and at last Niebla bade her good-bye and flew away, for all the white mist was floating off down the

river. But every day after that Alma found her little companion by the Yí, and was very happy, for now she had someone to talk to and to play with."

After I had finished the story Anita continued gazing into my face with an absorbed expression in her large wistful eyes. She seemed half scared, half delighted at what she had heard; but presently, before the little thing had said a word, Monica, who had been directing shy and wondering glances towards us for some time, came, and taking her by the hand led her away to bed.

I was getting sleepy then, and as the clatter of talk and warlike preparation showed no signs of abating, I was glad to be shown into another room, where some sheepskins, rugs, and a couple of ponchos were given to me for a bed.

During the night all the men took their departure, for in the morning, when I went into the kitchen, I only found the old woman and Alday's wife sipping bitter maté. The child, they informed me, had disappeared from the house an hour before, and Monica had gone out to look for her. Alday's wife was highly indignant at the little one's escapade, for it was high time for Anita to go out with the flock. After taking maté I went out, and looking towards the Yí veiled in a silvery mist, I spied Monica leading the culprit home by the hand, and went to meet them. Poor little Anita! her face stained with tears, her little legs and feet covered with clay and scratched by sharp reeds in fifty places, her dress soaking wet with the heavy mist, looked a most pitiful object.

"Where did you find her?" I asked the girl, beginning

to fear that I had been the indirect cause of the poor child's misfortunes.

"Down by the river looking for little Niebla. I knew she would be there when I missed her this morning."

"How did you know that?" I asked. "You did not hear the story I told her."

"I made her repeat it all to me last night," said Monica.

After that little Anita was scolded, shaken, washed and dried, then fed and finally lifted on to the back of her pony and sent to take care of the sheep. While undergoing this treatment she maintained a profound silence, her little face puckered up into an expression that boded tears. They were not for the public, however, and only after she was on the pony with the reins in her little mites of hands and her back towards us did she give way to her grief and disappointment at having failed to find the beautiful child of the mist.

I was astonished to find that she had taken the fantastic little tale invented to amuse her as truth; but the poor babe had never read books or heard stories, and the fairy tale had been too much for her starved little imagination. I remember that once on another occasion I told a pathetic story of a little child, lost in a great wilderness, to a girl about Anita's age, and just as unaccustomed to this kind of mental fare. Next morning her mother informed me that my little listener had spent half the night sobbing and begging to be allowed to go and look for that lost child I had told her about.

Hearing that Alday would not return till evening or till the following day, I asked his wife to lend or give me

a horse to proceed on my journey. This, however, she could not do; then she added, very graciously, that while all the men were away my presence in the house would be a comfort to her, a man always being a great protection. The arrangement did not strike me as one very advantageous to myself, but as I could not journey very well to Montevideo on foot, I was compelled to sit still and wait for Alday's return.

It was dull work talking to those two women in the kitchen. They were both great talkers, and had evidently come to a tacit agreement to share their one listener fairly between them, for first one, then the other would speak with a maddening monotony. Alday's wife had six favourite, fine-sounding words—*elements*, *superior*, *division*, *prolongation*, *justification*, and *disproportion*. One of these she somehow managed to drag into every sentence, and sometimes she succeeded in getting in two. Whenever this happened the achievement made her so proud that she would in the most deliberate cold-blooded way repeat the sentence again, word for word. The strength of the old woman lay in dates. Not an occurrence did she mention, whether it referred to some great public event or to some trivial domestic incident in her own rancho, without giving the year, the month, and the day. The duet between these two confounded barrel-organs, one grinding out rhetoric, the other chronology, went on all the morning, and often I turned to Monica, sitting over her sewing, in hopes of a different tune from her more melodious instrument, but in vain, for never a word dropped from those silent lips. Occasionally her

dark luminous eyes were raised for a moment, only to sink abashed again when they encountered mine. After breakfast I went for a walk along the river, where I spent several hours hunting for flowers and fossils, and amusing myself as best I could. There were legions of duck, coot, rosy spoonbills, and black-necked swans disporting themselves in the water, and I was very thankful that I had no gun with me, and so was not tempted to startle them with rude noises, and send any of them away to languish wounded amongst the reeds. At length, after having indulged in a good swim, I set out to walk back to the estancia.

When still about a mile from the house as I walked on, swinging my stick and singing aloud in lightness of heart, I passed a clump of willow trees, and looking up saw Monica under them watching my approach. She was standing perfectly motionless, and when I caught sight of her cast her eyes demurely down, apparently to contemplate her bare feet, which looked very white on the deep green turf. In one hand she held a cluster of stalks of the large, crimson autumnal lilies which had just begun to blossom. My singing ceased suddenly, and I stood for some moments gazing admiringly at the shy, rustic beauty.

"What a distance you have walked to gather lilies, Monica!" I said, approaching her. "Will you give me one of your stalks?"

"They were gathered for the Virgin, so I cannot give away any of these," she replied. "If you will wait here under the trees I will find one to give you."

I agreed to wait for her; then placing the cluster she had gathered on the grass she left me. Before long she returned with a stalk, round, polished, slender, like a pipe stem, and crowned with its cluster of three splendid crimson flowers.

When I had sufficiently thanked her and admired it, I said, "What boon are you going to ask from the Virgin, Monica, when you offer her these flowers—safety for your lover in the wars?"

"No, señor; I have no offering to make, and no boon to ask. They are for my aunt; I offered to gather them for her, because—I wished to meet you here."

"To meet me, Monica—what for?"

"To ask for a story, señor," she replied, colouring, and with a shy glance at my face.

"Ah, we have had stories enough," I said. "Remember poor Anita running away this morning to look for a playmate in the wet mist."

"She is a child; I am a woman."

"Then, Monica, you must have a lover who will be jealous if you listen to stories from a stranger's lips in this lonely spot."

"No person will ever know that I met you here," she returned—so bashful, yet so persistent.

"I have forgotten all my stories," I said.

"Then, señor, I will go and find you another *ramo* of lilies while you think of one to tell me."

"No," I said, "you must get no more lilies for me. Look, I will give you back these you gave me." And saying that, I fastened them in her black hair, where by

contrast they looked very splendid, and gave the girl a new grace. "Ah, Monica, they make you look too pretty —let me take them out again."

But she would not have them taken. "I will leave you now to think of a story for me," she said, blushing and turning away.

Then I took her hands and made her face me. "Listen, Monica," I said. "Do you know that these lilies are full of strange magic? See how crimson they are; that is the colour of passion, for they have been steeped in passion, and turn my heart to fire. If you bring me any more of them, Monica, I shall tell you a story that will make you tremble with fear—tremble like the willow leaves and turn pale as the mists over the Yí."

She smiled at my words; it was like a ray of sunlight falling through the foliage on her face. Then, in a voice that was almost a whisper, she said, "What will the story be about, señor? Tell me, then I shall know whether to gather lilies for you or not."

"It will be about a stranger meeting a sweet, pale girl standing under the trees, her dark eyes cast down, and red lilies in her hand; and how she asked him for a story, but he could speak to her of nothing but love, love, love."

When I finished speaking she gently withdrew her hands from mine and turned away amongst the trees, doubtless to fly from me, trembling at my words, like a frightened young fawn from the hunter.

So for a moment I thought. But no, there lay the lilies gathered for a religious purpose at my feet, and

there was nothing reproachful in the shy dark eyes when they glanced back for a moment at me; for in spite of those warning words she had only gone to find more of those perilous crimson flowers to give me.

Not then, while I waited for her return with palpitating heart, but afterwards in calmer moments, and when Monica had become a pretty picture in the past, did I compose the following lines. I am not so vain as to believe that they possess any great poetical merit, and introduce them principally to let the reader know how to pronounce the pretty name of that Oriental river, which it still keeps in remembrance of a vanished race.

Standing silent, pale her face was,
  Pale and sweet to see:
'Neath the willows waiting for me,
  Willow-like was she,
Smiling, blushing, trembling, bashful
  Maid of Yí.

Willow-like she trembled, yet she
  Never fled from me;
But her dove-like eyes were downcast,
  On the grass to see
White feet standing: white thy feet were,
  Maid of Yí.

Stalks of lilies in her hands were:
  Crimson lilies three,
Placed I in her braids of black hair—
  They were bright to see!
Lift thy dark eyes, for I love thee,
  Maid of Yí!

CHAPTER XV

WHEN THE TRUMPET CALLS TO BATTLE

IN the evening Alday returned with a couple of his friends, and as soon as an opportunity offered, I took him aside and begged him to let me have a horse to continue my journey to Montevideo. He answered evasively that the horse I had lost in the neighbouring forest would probably be recovered in the course of two or three days. I replied that if he would let me have a horse, the one I had lost, together with saddle, poncho, etc., could be claimed by him whenever they turned up. He then said that he could not very well give me a horse, "with saddle and bridle also." It looked as if he wanted to keep me in his house for some purpose of his own, and this made me all the more determined to leave it immediately, in spite of the tender, reproachful glances which Monica flashed on me from under her long, drooping eyelashes. I told him that if I could not have a horse I would leave his estancia on foot. That rather put him in a corner; for in this country, where horse-stealing and cheating at cards are looked on as venial offences, to let a man leave your estancia on foot is considered a very dishonourable thing. He pondered over my declaration for some minutes, then, after conferring with his friends, he

promised to provide me with all I required next day. I had heard nothing more about the revolution, but after supper Alday suddenly became very confidential, and said that the whole country would be up in arms in the course of a very few days, and that it would be highly dangerous for me to attempt travelling by myself to the capital. He expatiated on the immense prestige of General Santa Coloma, who had just taken up arms against the Colorado party then in power, and concluded by saying that my safest plan would be to join the rebels and accompany them on their march to Montevideo, which would begin almost immediately. I replied that I took no interest in the dissensions of the Banda Orientál, and did not wish to compromise myself by joining a military expedition of any kind. He shrugged his shoulders, and renewing his promise of a horse next day, retired to rest.

On rising next morning I found that the others were already up. The horses were standing saddled at the door, and Alday, pointing out a very fair-looking animal, informed me that it had been saddled for me, and then added that he and his friends would ride one or two leagues with me to put me on the right road to Montevideo. He had suddenly become almost too kind, but in the simplicity of my heart I believed that he was only making amends for the slight inhospitality of the day before.

After partaking of bitter maté I thanked my hostess, looked my last into Monica's dark, sorrowful eyes, lifted for one moment to mine, and kissed little Anita's pathetic face, by so doing filling the child with astonishment and

causing considerable amusement to the other members of the family. After we had ridden about four miles, keeping nearly parallel with the river, it struck me that we were not going in the right direction—the right one for me, at any rate. I therefore checked my horse and told my companions that I would not trouble them to ride with me any farther.

"My friend," said Alday, approaching me, "you will, if you leave us now, infallibly fall into the hands of some *partida*, who, finding you without a passport, will take you to El Molino, or to some other centre. Though it would make no difference if you had a passport, for they would only tear it up and take you all the same. In these circumstances it is your safest plan to go with us to El Molino, where General Santa Coloma is collecting his forces, and you will then be able to explain your position to him."

"I refuse to go to El Molino," I said angrily, exasperated at his treachery.

"You will then compel us to take you there," he returned.

I had no wish to become a prisoner again so soon, and seeing that a bold stroke was necessary to keep my liberty, I suddenly reined up my horse and drew my revolver. "My friends," I said, "your road lies in that direction; mine in this. I wish you good morning."

I had scarcely finished speaking before a blow of a heavy whip-handle descended on my arm below the elbow, almost breaking it, and sending me off my horse, while the revolver went spinning away a dozen yards. The

blow had been dealt by one of Alday's two followers who had just dropped a little to the rear, and the rascal certainly showed a marvellous quickness and dexterity in disabling me.

Wild with rage and pain, I scrambled to my feet, and drawing my knife, threatened to stab the first man who approached me; and then, in unmeasured language, I abused Alday for his cowardice and brutality. He only smiled and replied that he considered my youth, and therefore felt no resentment against me for using such intemperate words.

"And now, my friend," he continued, after picking up my revolver and remounting his horse, "let us waste no more time, but hasten on to El Molino, where you can state your case to the General."

As I did not wish to be tied on to my horse and carried in that unpleasant and ignominious manner, I had to obey. Climbing into the saddle with some difficulty, we set out towards the village of El Molino at a swinging gallop. The rough motion of the horse I rode increased the pain in my arm till it became intolerable; then one of the men mercifully bound it up in a sling, after which I was able to travel more comfortably, though still suffering a great deal.

The day was excessively warm, and we did not reach our destination till about three o'clock in the afternoon. Just before entering the town we rode through a little army of gauchos encamped on the adjacent plain. Some of them were engaged cooking meat, others were saddling horses, while others in bodies of twenty or thirty

were going through cavalry exercises, the whole making a scene of wonderful animation. Very nearly all the men wore the ordinary gaucho costume, and those who were exercising carried lances, to which were attached little white fluttering bannerets. Passing through the encampment, we clattered into the town, composed of about seventy or eighty houses of stone or mud, some thatched, others with tiled roofs, and every house with a large garden attached to it. At the official building facing the plaza a guard of ten men, armed with carbines, was stationed. We dismounted and went into the building, only to hear that the General had just left the town, and was not expected back till the following day.

Alday spoke to an officer sitting at a table in the room we were shown into, addressing him as Major. He was a thin, elderly man, with calm grey eyes and a colourless face, and looked like a gentleman. After hearing a few words from Alday, he turned to me and said courteously that he was sorry to tell me I should have to remain in El Molino till the General's return, when I could give an account of myself to him.

"We do not," he said in conclusion, "wish to compel any foreigner, or any Oriental even, to join our forces; but we are naturally suspicious of strangers, having already caught two or three spies in the neighbourhood. Unfortunately you are not provided with a passport, and it is best that the General should see you."

"Sir officer," I replied, "by ill-treating and detaining an Englishman you are doing your cause no good."

He answered that he was grieved that his people had

found it necessary to treat me roughly, for he put it in that mild way. Everything, he said, short of liberating me, would be done to make my sojourn in El Molino pleasant.

"If it is necessary that the General should see me himself before I can have my liberty, pray let these men take me to him at once," I said.

"He has not yet left El Molino," said an orderly standing in the room. "He is at the end of the town at the Casa Blanca, and does not leave till half-past three."

"It is nearly that now," said the officer, consulting his watch. "Take him to the General at once, Lieutenant Alday."

I thanked the officer, who had looked and spoken so unlike a revolutionary bandit, and as soon as I had succeeded in clambering on to my horse we were once more dashing along the main street at a fast gallop. We drew up before a large old-looking stone house at the end of the town, standing some distance back from the road, and screened from it by a double row of tall Lombardy poplars. The back of the house was towards the road, and passing round to the front after leaving our horses at the gate, we entered a spacious *patio*, or yard. Running along the front of the dwelling was a wide corridor, supported by wooden pillars, painted white, while the whole of the *patio* was shaded by an immense grape-vine. This was evidently one of the best houses in the place, and coming directly from the glaring sun and the white dusty road the vine-shaded *patio* and corridor looked delight-

fully cool and inviting. A gay company of twelve or fifteen people were gathered under the corridor, some sipping maté, others sucking grapes; and when we came on the scene a young lady was just finishing a song she was singing. I at once singled out General Santa Coloma, sitting by the young lady with the guitar—a tall, imposing man, with somewhat irregular features, and a bronzed, weather-beaten face. He was booted and spurred, and over his uniform wore a white silk poncho with purple fringe. I judged from his countenance that he was not a stern or truculent man, as one expects a Caudillo—a leader of men—in the Banda Orientál to be: and remembering that in a few minutes he would be leaving the house, I was anxious to push forward and state my case to him. The others, however, prevented me, for the General just then happened to be engaged in a vivacious conversation with the young lady sitting by him. When I had once looked attentively at this girl I had eyes for no other face there. The type was Spanish, and I have never seen a more perfect face of the kind; a wealth of blue-black hair shading the low broad forehead, straight nose, dark luminous eyes, and crimson pouting lips. She was tall, perfect in her figure as in her face, and wore a white dress with a deep red China rose on her bosom for only ornament. Standing there unnoticed at the end of the corridor I gazed with a kind of fascination on her, listening to her light rippling laughter and lively talk, watching her graceful gestures, her sparkling eyes and damask cheeks flushed with excitement. Here is a woman, I thought with a sigh—I felt a slight twinge at that

disloyal sigh—I could have worshipped. She was pressing the guitar on the General.

"You have promised to sing one song before you go, and I cannot let you off," she exclaimed.

At length he took the instrument, protesting that his voice was a very bad one; then, sweeping the strings, began that fine old Spanish song of love and war—

Cuando suena la trompa guerrera.

His voice was uncultivated and somewhat harsh, but there was a good deal of fire and expression in the performance, and it was rapturously applauded.

The moment the song was over he handed her back the guitar, and starting up hastily, bade the company adieu. and turned to go.

Coming forward, I placed myself before him and began to speak.

"I am pressed for time and cannot listen to you now," he said quickly, scarcely glancing at me. "You are a prisoner — wounded, I see; well, when I return——" Suddenly he stopped, caught hold of my wounded arm, and said, "How did you get hurt? Tell me quickly."

His sharp impatient manner, and the sight of twenty people all standing round staring at me, quite upset me, and I could only stammer out a few unintelligible words, feeling that my face was blushing scarlet to the very roots of my hair.

"Let me tell you, General," said Alday, advancing.

"No, no," said the General; "he shall speak."

The sight of Alday so eager to give his version of the

affair first restored my anger to me, and with that came back the power of speech and the other faculties which I had lost for a moment.

"Sir General, all I have to say is this," I said; "I came to this man's house at night, a stranger, lost, on foot, for my horse had been stolen from me. I asked him for shelter in the belief that at least the one virtue of hospitality still survives in this country. He, assisted by these two men, treacherously disabled me with a blow on my arm and dragged me here a prisoner."

"My good friend," said the General, "I am extremely sorry that you have been hurt through an excess of zeal on the part of one of my people. But I can scarcely regret this incident, painful as it seems, since it enables me to assure you that one other virtue besides hospitality still survives in the Banda Orientál—I mean gratitude."

"I do not understand you," I said.

"We were companions in misfortune a very short time ago," he returned. "Have you forgotten the service you did me then?"

I stared at him, astonished at his words; and while I looked into his face suddenly that scene at the magistrate's estancia, when I went with the key to let my fellow-traveller out of the stocks, and he jumped up and seized my hand, flashed on me. Still I was not quite sure, and half whispered tentatively, "What, Marcos Marcó?"

"Yes," he returned, smiling, "that was my name at that moment. My friends," he continued, resting a hand on my shoulder, and speaking to the others, "I have met this young Englishman before. A few days ago, when

I was on my way hither, I was arrested at Las Cuevas in his company; it was by means of his assistance that I succeeded in making my escape. He did this good deed, believing at the time that he was helping a poor peasant, and not expecting any return."

I might have reminded him that only after he had given me a solemn assurance that he did not intend attempting to make his escape, did I consent to get his legs out of the stocks. However, as he thought proper to forget that part of the affair I was not going to recall it to him.

There were many surprised exclamations from the bystanders, and glancing at that beautiful girl, who was standing near with the others, I found her dark eyes fixed on my face with an expression of tenderness and sympathy in them that sent the blood rushing to my heart.

"They have hurt you badly, I fear," said the General, addressing me again. "To continue your journey now would be imprudent. Let me beg of you to remain where you are, in this house, till your arm is better." Then, turning to the young lady, he said, "Dolores, will you and your mother take charge of my young friend till I return, and see that his injured arm is attended to?"

"My General, you will make us happy by leaving him in our care," she replied, with a bright smile.

He then introduced me as Don Ricardo simply, for he did not know my surname, to the lovely señorita—Dolores Zelaya; after which he again bade us adieu and hurried away.

When he had gone Alday advanced, hat in hand, and

gave me back my revolver, which I had forgotten all about. I took it with my left hand, and put it in my pocket. He then apologised for having treated me roughly —the Major had taught him that word—but without the faintest trace of servility in his speech or manner; and after that he offered me his hand.

"Which will you have," I said, "the hand you have injured or the left hand?"

He immediately dropped his own hand to his side, then bowing, said he would wait till I had recovered the use of my right hand. Turning to go, he added with a smile that he hoped the injury would soon heal, so that I would be able to wield a sword in my friend Santa Coloma's cause.

His manner, I thought, was a little too independent. "Pray take back your horse now," I said, "as I have no further use for it, and accept my thanks for conducting me thus far on my journey."

"Do not mention it," he replied, with a dignified wave of his hand, "I am pleased to have been able to render you this small service."

CHAPTER XVI

ROMANCE OF THE WHITE FLOWER

WHEN Alday had left us, the charming señorita, in whose care I was well pleased to find myself, led me into a cool spacious room, dimly lighted, scantily furnished, and with a floor of red tiles. It was a great relief to drop into a sofa there, for I now felt fatigued and suffered great pain from my arm. In a few moments I had the señorita, her mother, Doña Mercedes, and an old serving-woman all round me. Gently drawing off my coat, they subjected my wounded arm to a minute examination; their compassionate finger-tips—those of the lovely Dolores especially—feeling like a soft cooling rain on the swollen inflamed part, which had become quite purple.

"Ah, how barbarous of them to hurt you like that! a friend, too, of our General!" exclaimed my beautiful nurse; which made me think that I had involuntarily become associated with the right political party in the state.

They rubbed the arm with sweet oil; while the old servant brought in a bundle of rue from the garden, which being bruised in a mortar, filled the room with a fresh aromatic smell. With this fragrant herb she made a cooling cataplasm. Having dressed my arm they placed

it in a sling, then in place of my coat a light Indian poncho was brought for me to wear.

"I think you are feverish," said Doña Mercedes, feeling my pulse. "We must send for the doctor—we have a doctor in our little town, a very skilful man."

"I have little faith in doctors, señora," I said, "but great faith in women and grapes. If you will give me a cluster from your vine to refresh my blood I promise to be well very soon."

Dolores laughed lightly and left the room, only to return in a few minutes with a dish full of ripe purple clusters. They were delicious and did seem to allay the fever I felt, which had probably been caused as much by angry passions as by the blow I had received.

While I reclined luxuriously, sucking my grapes, the two ladies sat on each side of me, ostensibly fanning themselves, but only, I think, trying to make the air cooler for me. Very cool and pleasant they made it, certainly, but the gentle attentions of Dolores were at the same time such as might well create a subtler kind of fever in a man's veins—a malady not to be cured by fruit, fans, or phlebotomy.

"Who would not suffer blows for such compensation as this!" I said.

"Do not say such a thing!" exclaimed the señorita, with wonderful animation. "Have you not rendered a great service to our dear General—to our beloved country! If we had it in our power to give you everything your heart might desire it would be nothing, nothing. We must be your debtors for ever."

I smiled at her extravagant words, but they were very sweet to hear, none the less.

"Your ardent love of your country is a beautiful sentiment," I remarked somewhat indiscreetly, "but is General Santa Coloma so necessary to its welfare?"

She looked offended and did not reply. "You are a stranger in our country, señor, and do not quite understand these things," said the mother gently. "Dolores must not forget that. You know nothing of the cruel wars we have seen and how our enemies have conquered only by bringing in the foreigner to their aid. Ah, señor, the bloodshed, the proscriptions, the infamies which they have brought on this land! But there is one man they have never yet succeeded in crushing: always from boyhood he has been foremost in the fight, defying their bullets, and not to be corrupted by their Brazilian gold. Is it strange that he is so much to us, who have lost all our relations, and have suffered many persecutions, being deprived almost of the means of subsistence that hirelings and traitors might be enriched with our property? To us in this house he is even more than to others. He was my husband's friend and companion in arms. He has done us a thousand favours, and if he ever succeeds in overthrowing this infamous government he will restore to us all the property we have lost. But *ai de mi*, I cannot see deliverance yet."

"Mamita, do not say such a thing!" exclaimed her daughter. "Do you begin to despair now when there is most reason to hope?"

"Child, what can he do with this handful of ill-armed

men?" returned the mother sadly. "He has bravely raised the standard, but the people do not flock to it. Ah, when this revolt is crushed, like so many others, we poor women will only have to lament for more friends slain and fresh persecutions." And here she covered her eyes with her handkerchief.

Dolores tossed her head back and made a sudden gesture of impatience.

"Do you then expect to see a great army formed before the ink is dry on the General's proclamation? When Santa Coloma was a fugitive without a follower you hoped; now when he is with us, and actually preparing for a march on the capital, you begin to lose heart —I cannot understand it!"

Doña Mercedes rose without replying, and left the room. The lovely enthusiast dropped her head on her hand, and remained silent, taking no notice of me, a cloud of sorrow on her countenance.

"Señorita," I said, "it is not necessary for you to remain longer here. Only tell me before going that you forgive me, for it makes me very unhappy to think that I have offended you."

She turned to me with a very bright smile and gave me her hand.

"Ah, it is for you to forgive me for hastily taking offence at a light word," she said. "I must not allow anything you say in future to spoil my gratitude. Do you know I think you are one of those who like to laugh at most things, señor—no, let me call you Richard, and you shall call me Dolores, for we must remain friends

always. Let us make a compact, then it will be impossible for us to quarrel. You shall be free to doubt, question, laugh at everything, except one thing only—my faith in Santa Coloma."

"Yes, I will gladly make that agreement," I replied. "It will be a new kind of paradise, and of the fruit of every tree I may eat except of this tree only."

She laughed gaily.

"I will now leave you," she said. "You are suffering pain, and are very tired. Perhaps you will be able to sleep." While speaking she brought a second cushion for my head, then left me, and before long I fell into a refreshing doze.

I spent three days of enforced idleness at the Casa Blanca, as the house was called, before Santa Coloma returned, and after the rough experience I had undergone, during which I had subsisted on a flesh diet untempered by bread or vegetables, they were indeed like days spent in paradise to me. Then the General came back. I was sitting alone in the garden when he arrived and coming out to me he greeted me warmly.

"I greatly feared from my previous experience of your impatience under restraint that you might have left us," he said kindly.

"I could not do that very well yet without a horse to ride on," I returned.

"Well, I came here just now to say I wish to present you with a horse and saddle. The horse is standing at the gate now, I believe; but if you are only waiting for a horse to leave us I shall have to regret making you this

present. Do not be in a hurry; you have yet many years to live in which to accomplish all you wish to do, and let us have the pleasure of your company a few days longer. Doña Mercedes and her daughter desire nothing better than to keep you with them."

I promised him not to run away immediately, a promise which was not hard to make; then we went to inspect my horse, which proved to be a very fine bay, saddled with a dashing native *recado*.

"Come with me and try him," he said. "I am going to ride out to the Cerro Solo."

The ride proved an extremely pleasant one, as I had not mounted a horse for some days, and had been longing to spice my idle hours with a little exhilarating motion. We went at a swinging gallop over the grassy plain, the General all the time discoursing freely of his plans and of the brilliant prospects awaiting all those timely wise individuals who should elect to link their fortunes with his at this early stage of the campaign.

The Cerro, three leagues distant from the village of El Molino, was a high conical hill standing quite alone and overlooking the country for a vast distance around. A few well-mounted men were stationed on the summit, keeping watch; and after talking with them for a while the General led me to a spot a hundred yards away, where there was a large mound of sand and stone, up which we made our horses climb with some difficulty. While we stood here he pointed out the conspicuous objects on the surface of the surrounding country, telling me the names of the estancias, rivers, distant hills, and

other things. The whole country about us seemed very familiar to him. He ceased speaking at length, but continued gazing over the wide sunlit prospect with a strange far-off look on his face. Suddenly dropping the reins on the neck of his horse, he stretched out his arms towards the south and began to murmur words which I could not catch, while an expression of mingled fury and exultation transformed his face. It passed away as suddenly as it came. Then he dismounted, and stooping till his knee touched the ground he kissed the rock before him, after which he sat down and quietly invited me to do the same. Returning to the subject he had talked about during our ride, he began openly pressing me to join him in his march to Montevideo, which, he said, would begin almost immediately, and would infallibly result in a victory, after which he would reward me for the incalculable service I had rendered him in assisting him to escape from the Juez of Las Cuevas. These tempting offers, which would have fired my brain in other circumstances—the single state, I mean—I felt compelled to decline, though I did not state my real reasons for doing so. He shrugged his shoulders in the eloquent Oriental fashion, remarking that it would not surprise him if I altered my resolution in a few days.

"Never!" I mentally ejaculated.

Then he recalled our first meeting again, spoke of Margarita, that marvellously beautiful child, asking if I had not thought it strange so fair a flower as that should have sprung from the homely stalk of a sweet potato? I answered that I had been surprised at first, but had

ceased to believe that she was a child of Batata's, or of any of his kin. He then offered to tell me Margarita's history; and I was not surprised to hear that he knew it.

"I owe you this," he said, "in expiation of the somewhat offensive remarks I addressed to you that day in reference to the girl. But you must remember that I was then only Marcos Marcó, a peasant, and having some slight knowledge of acting it was only natural that my speech should be, as you find it in our common people, somewhat dry and ironical.

"Many years ago there lived in this country one Basilio de la Barca, a person of so noble a figure and countenance that to all those who beheld him he became the type of perfect beauty, so that a 'Basilio de la Barca' came to be a proverbial expression in Montevidean society when anyone surpassingly handsome was spoken of. Though he had a gay, light-hearted disposition and loved social pleasures, he was not spoilt by the admiration his beauty excited. Simple-minded and modest he remained always; though perhaps not capable of any very strong passion, for though he won, without seeking it, the hearts of many fair women, he did not marry. He might have married some rich woman to improve his position had he been so minded, but in this, as in everything else in his life, Basilio appeared to be incapable of doing anything to advance his own fortunes. The de la Barcas had once possessed great wealth in land in the country, and, I have heard, descended from an ancient noble family of Spain During the long, disastrous wars this country has suffered, when it was conquered in turn by England, Portugal,

Spain, Brazil, and the Argentines, the family became impoverished and at last appeared to be dying out. The last of the de la Barcas was Basilio, and the evil destiny which had pursued all of that name for so many generations did not spare him. His whole life was a series of calamities. When young he entered the army, but in his first engagement he received a terrible wound which disabled him for life and compelled him to abandon the military career. After that he embarked all his little fortune in commerce and was ruined by a dishonest partner. At length when he had been reduced to great poverty, being then about forty years old, he married an old woman out of gratitude for the kindness she had shown to him; and with her he went to live on the sea-coast, several leagues east of Cabo Santa Maria. Here in a small rancho in a lonely spot called Barranca del Peregrino, and with only a few sheep and cows to subsist on, he spent the remainder of his life. His wife, though old, bore him one child, a daughter, named Transita. They taught her nothing; for in all respects they lived like peasants and had forgotten the use of books. The situation was also wild and solitary, and they very seldom saw a strange face. Transita spent her childhood in rambling over the dunes on that lonely coast, with only wild flowers, birds, and the ocean waves for playmates. One day, her age being then about eleven, she was at her usual pastimes, her golden hair blowing in the wind, her short dress and bare legs wet with the spray, chasing the waves as they retired, or flying with merry shouts from them as they hurried back towards the shore, flinging a cloud of

foam over her retreating form, when a youth, a boy of fifteen, rode up and saw her there. He was hunting ostriches, when, losing sight of his companions, and finding himself near the ocean, he rode down to the shore to watch the tide coming in.

"Yes, I was that boy, Richard—you are quick in making conclusions." This he said not in reply to any remark I had made, but to my thoughts, which he frequently guessed very aptly.

"The impression this exquisite child made on me it would be impossible to convey in words. I had lived much in the capital, had been educated in our best college, and was accustomed to associate with pretty women. I had also crossed the water and had seen all that was most worthy of admiration in the Argentine cities. And remember, that with us a youth of fifteen already knows something of life. This child, playing with the waves, was like nothing I had seen before. I regarded her not as a mere human creature; she seemed more like some being from I know not what far-off celestial region who had strayed to earth, just as a bird of white and azure plumage and unknown to our woods, sometimes appears, blown hither from a distant tropical country or island, filling those who see it with wonder and delight. Imagine, if you can, Margarita with her shining hair loose to the winds, swift and graceful in her motions as the waves she plays with, her sapphire eyes sparkling like sunlight on the waters, the tender tints of the sea-shell in her ever-changing countenance, with a laughter that seems to echo the wild melody of the sandpiper's note.

Margarita has inherited the form, not the spirit, of the child Transita. She is an exquisite statue endowed with life. Transita, with lines equally graceful and colours just as perfect, had caught the spirit of the wind and sunshine and was all freedom, motion, fire—a being half human, half angelic. I saw her only to love her; nor was it a common passion she inspired in me. I worshipped her, and longed to wear her on my bosom; but I shrank then and for a long time after from breathing the hot breath of love on so tender and heavenly a blossom. I went to her parents and opened my heart to them. My family being well known to Basilio, I obtained his consent to visit their lonely rancho whenever I could; and I, on my part, promised not to speak of love to Transita till her sixteenth year. Three years after I had found Transita, I was ordered to a distant part of the country, for I was already in the army then, and fearing that it would not be possible for me to visit them for a long time, I persuaded Basilio to let me speak to his daughter, who was now fourteen. She had by this time grown extremely fond of me, and she always looked forward with delight to my visits, when we would spend days together rambling along the shore, or seated on some cliff overlooking the sea, talking of the simple things she knew, and of that wonderful, far-away city life of which she was never tired of hearing. When I opened my heart to her she was at first frightened at these new strange emotions I spoke of. Soon, however, I was made happy by seeing her fear grow less. In one day she ceased to be a child; the rich blood mantled her cheeks

to leave her the next moment pale and tremulous; her tender lips were toying with the rim of the honeyed cup. Before I left her she had promised me her hand, and at parting even clung to me, with her beautiful eyes wet with tears.

"Three years passed before I returned to seek her. During that time I sent scores of letters to Basilio, but received no reply. Twice I was wounded in fight, once very seriously. I was also a prisoner for several months. I made my escape at last, and returning to Montevideo obtained leave of absence. Then, with heart afire with sweet anticipations, I sought that lonely sea-coast once more, only to find the weeds growing on the spot where Basilio's rancho had stood. In the neighbourhood I learnt that he had died two years before, and that after his death the widow had returned to Montevideo with Transita. After long inquiry in that city I discovered that she had not long survived her husband, and that a foreign señora had taken Transita away, no one knew whither. Her loss cast a great shadow on my life. Poignant grief cannot endure for ever, nor for very long; only the memory of grief endures. To this memory, which cannot fade, it is perhaps due that in one respect at least I am not like other men. I feel that I am incapable of passion for any woman. No, not if a new Lucrezia Borgia were to come my way, scattering the fiery seeds of adoration upon all men, could they blossom to love in this arid heart. Since I lost Transita I have had one thought, one love, one religion, and it is all told in one word—*Patria*.

"Years passed. I was captain in General Oribe's army at the siege of my own city. One day a lad was captured in our lines, and came very near being put to death as a spy. He had come out from Montevideo, and was looking for me. He had been sent, he said, by Transita de la Barca, who was lying ill in the town, and desired to speak to me before she died. I asked and obtained permission from our General, who had a strong personal friendship for me, to penetrate into the town. This was, of course, dangerous, and more so for me, perhaps, than it would have been for many of my brother officers, for I was very well known to the besieged. I succeeded, however, by persuading the officers of a French sloop of war stationed in the harbour to assist me. These foreigners at that time had friendly relations with the officers of both armies, and three of them had at one time visited our General to ask him to let them hunt ostriches in the interior. He passed them on to me, and taking them to my own estancia, I entertained them and hunted with them for several days. For this hospitality they had expressed themselves very grateful, inviting me repeatedly to visit them on board, and also saying that they would gladly do me any personal service in the town, which they visited constantly. I love not the French, believing them to be the most vain and egotistical, consequently the least chivalrous, of mankind; but these officers were in my debt, and I resolved to ask them to help me. Under cover of night I went on board their ship; I told them my story, and asked them to take me on shore with them disguised as one of themselves. With some difficulty

they consented, and I was thus enabled next day to be in Montevideo and with my long-lost Transita. I found her lying on her bed, emaciated and white as death, in the last stage of some fatal pulmonary complaint. On the bed with her was a child between two and three years old, exceedingly beautiful like her mother, for one glance was sufficient to tell me it was Transita's child. Overcome with grief at finding her in this pitiful condition, I could only kneel at her side pouring out the last tender tears that have fallen from these eyes. We Orientals are not tearless men, and I have wept since then, but only with rage and hatred. My last tears of tenderness were shed over unhappy, dying Transita.

"Briefly she told me her story. No letter from me had ever reached Basilio; it was supposed that I had fallen in battle, or that my heart had changed. When her mother lay dying in Montevideo she was visited by a wealthy Argentine lady named Romero, who had heard of Transita's singular beauty, and wished to see her merely out of curiosity. She was so charmed with the girl that she offered to take her and bring her up as her own daughter. To this the mother, who was reduced to the greatest poverty and was dying, consented gladly. Transita was in this way taken to Buenos Ayres, where she had masters to instruct her, and lived in great splendour. The novelty of this life charmed her for a time; the pleasures of a large city, and the universal admiration her beauty excited, occupied her mind and made her happy. When she was seventeen the Señora Romero bestowed her hand on a young man of that city,

named Andrada, a wealthy person. He was a fashionable man, a gambler, and a Sybarite, and having conceived a violent passion for the girl, he succeeded in winning over the señora to aid his suit. Before marrying him Transita told him frankly that she felt incapable of great affection for him; he cared nothing for that, he only wished, like the animal he was, to possess her for her beauty. Shortly after marrying her he took her to Europe, knowing very well that a man with a full purse, and whose spirit is a compound of swine and goat, finds life pleasanter in Paris than in the Plata. In Paris Transita lived a gay, but an unhappy life. Her husband's passion for her soon passed away, and was succeeded by neglect and insult. After three miserable years he abandoned her altogether to live with another woman, and then, in broken health, she returned with her child to her own country. When she had been several months in Montevideo she heard casually that I was still alive and in the besieging army; and anxious to impart her last wishes to a friend, had sent for me.

"Could you, my friend, could any man, divine the nature of that dying request Transita wished to make?

"Pointing to her child, she said, 'Do you not see that Margarita inherits that fatal gift of beauty which won for me a life of splendour, with extreme bitterness of heart and early death? Soon, before I die, perhaps, there will not be wanting some new Señora Romero to take charge of her, who will at last sell her to some rich, cruel man, as I was sold; for how can her beauty remain long concealed? It was with very different views for her that

I secretly left Paris and returned here. During all the miserable years I spent there I thought more and more of my childhood on that lonely coast, until, when I fell ill, I resolved to go back there to spend my last days on that beloved spot where I had been so happy. It was my intention to find some peasant family there who would be willing to take Margarita and bring her up as a peasant's child, with no knowledge of her father's position and of the life men live in towns. The siege and my failing health made it impossible for me to carry out that plan. I must die here, dear friend, and never see that lonely coast where we have sat together so often watching the waves. But I think only of poor little Margarita now, who will soon be motherless: will you not help me to save her? Promise me that you will take her away to some distant place, where she will be brought up as a peasant's child, and where her father will never find her. If you can promise me this, I will resign her to you now, and face death without even the sad consolation of seeing her by me to the last.'

"I promised to carry out her wishes, and also to see the child as often as circumstances would allow, and when she grew up to find her a good husband. But I would not deprive her of the child then. I told her that if she died, Margarita would be conveyed to the French ship in the harbour, and afterwards to me, and that I knew where to place her with good-hearted, simple peasants who loved me, and would obey my wishes in all things.

"She was satisfied, and I left her to make the necessary arrangements to carry out my plans. A few weeks later

Transita expired, and the child was brought to me. I then sent her to Batata's house, where, ignorant of the secret of her birth, she has been brought up as her mother wished her to be. May she never, like the unhappy Transita, fall into the power of a ravening beast in man's shape."

"Amen!" I exclaimed. "But surely, if this child will be entitled to a fortune some day, it will only be right that she should have it."

"We do not worship gold in this country," he replied. "With us the poor are just as happy as the rich, their wants are so few, and easily satisfied. It would be too much to say that I love the child more than I love anyone else; I think only of Transita's wishes; that for me is the only right in the matter. Had I failed to carry them out to the letter, then I should have suffered a great remorse. Possibly I may encounter Andrada some day, and pass my sword through his body; that would give me no remorse."

After some moments of silence he looked up and said, "Richard, you admired and loved that beautiful girl when you first saw her. Listen, if you wish it you shall have her for a wife. She is simple-minded, ignorant of the world, affectionate, and where she is told to love she will love. Batata's people will obey my wishes in everything."

I shook my head, smiling somewhat sorrowfully when I thought that the events of the last few days had already half obliterated Margarita's fair image from my mind. This unexpected proposition had, moreover, forced on me,

with a startling suddenness, the fact that by once performing the act of marriage a man has for ever used up the most glorious privilege of his sex—of course, I mean in countries where he is only allowed to have one wife. It was no longer in my power to say to any woman, however charming I might find her, "Be my wife." But I did not explain all this to the General.

"Ah, you are thinking of conditions," said he; "there will be none."

"No, you have guessed wrong—for once," I returned. "The girl is all you say; I have never seen a being more beautiful, and I have never heard a more romantic story than the one you have just told me about her birth. I can only echo your prayer that she may not suffer as her mother did. In name she is not a de la Barca, and perhaps destiny will spare her on that account."

He glanced keenly at me and smiled. "Perhaps you are thinking more of Dolores than of Margarita just now," he said. "Let me warn you of your danger there, my young friend. She is already promised to another."

Absurdly unreasonable as it may seem, I felt a jealous pang at that information; but then, of course, we are *not* reasonable beings, whatever the philosophers say.

I laughed, not very gaily, I must confess, and answered that there was no need to warn me, as Dolores would never be more to me than a very dear friend.

Even then I did not tell him that I was a married man; for often in the Banda Oriental I did not quite seem to know how to mix my truth and lies, and so preferred to hold my tongue. In this instance, as subsequent

events proved, I held it not wisely but too well. The open man, with no secrets from the world, often enough escapes disasters which overtake your very discreet person, who acts on the old adage that speech was given to us to conceal our thoughts

CHAPTER XVII

PASSION VERSUS PATRIOTISM

WITH a horse to travel on, and my arm so much better that the sling supporting it was worn rather for ornament than use, there was nothing except that promise not to run away immediately to detain me longer in the pleasant retreat of the Casa Blanca; nothing, that is, had I been a man of gutta-percha or cast-iron; being only a creature of clay—very impressionable clay as it happened—I could not persuade myself that I was quite well enough to start on that long ride over a disturbed country. Besides, my absence from Montevideo had already lasted so long that a few days more could not make much difference one way or the other; thus it came to pass that I still stayed on enjoying the society of my new friends, while every day, every hour in fact, I felt less able to endure the thought of tearing myself away from Dolores.

Much of my time was spent in the pleasant orchard adjoining the house. Here, growing in picturesque irregularity, were fifty or sixty old peach, nectarine, apricot, plum, and cherry trees, their boles double the thickness of a man's thigh; they had never been disfigured by the pruner's knife or saw, and their enormous size and rough

bark overgrown with grey lichen gave them an appearance of great antiquity. All about the ground, tangled together in a pretty confusion, flourished many of those dear familiar Old World garden flowers that spring up round the white man's dwelling in all temperate regions of the earth. Here were immemorial wallflowers, stocks and marigolds, tall hollyhock, gay poppy, brilliant bachelor's button; also, half hid amongst the grass, pansy and forget-me-not. The larkspur, red, white, and blue, flaunted everywhere; and here, too, was the unforgotten sweet-william, looking bright and velvety as of yore, yet, in spite of its brightness and stiff, green collar, still wearing the old shame-faced expression, as if it felt a little ashamed of its own pretty name. These flowers were not cultivated, but grew spontaneously from the seed they shed year by year on the ground, the gardener doing nothing for them beyond keeping the weeds down and bestowing a little water in hot weather. The solstitial heats being now over, during which European garden flowers cease to bloom for a season, they were again in gayest livery to welcome the long second spring of autumn, lasting from February to May. At the further end of this wilderness of flowers and fruit trees was an aloe hedge, covering a width of twenty to thirty yards with its enormous, disorderly, stave-like leaves. This hedge was like a strip of wild nature placed alongside of a plot of man's improved nature; and here, like snakes hunted from the open, the weeds and wildings which were not permitted to mix with the flowers had taken refuge. Protected by that rude bastion of spikes, the hemlock

opened feathery clusters of dark leaves and whitish umbels wherever it could reach up to the sunshine. There also grew the nightshade, with other solanaceous weeds, bearing little clusters of green and purple berries, wild oats, fox-tail grass, and nettles. The hedge gave them shelter, but no moisture, so that all these weeds and grasses had a somewhat forlorn and starved appearance, climbing up with long stringy stems among the powerful aloes. The hedge was also rich in animal life. There dwelt mice, cavies, and elusive little lizards; crickets sang all day long under it, while in every open space the green epeiras spread their geometric webs. Being rich in spiders it was a favourite hunting-ground of those insect desperadoes, the mason-wasps, that flew about loudly buzzing in their splendid gold and scarlet uniform. There were also many little shy birds here, and my favourite was the wren, for in its appearance and its scolding, jerky, gesticulating ways it is precisely like our house-wren, though it has a richer and more powerful song than the English bird. On the other side of the hedge was the *potrero*, or paddock, where a milch-cow with two or three horses were kept. The man-servant, whose name was Nepomucino, presided over orchard and paddock, also to some extent over the entire establishment. Nepomucino was a pure negro, a little old round-headed, blear-eyed man, about five feet four in height, the short, lumpy wool on his head quite grey; slow in speech and movements, his old black or chocolate-coloured fingers all crooked, stiff-jointed, and pointing spontaneously in different directions. I have never seen anything in the human subject to equal the

dignity of Nepomucino, the profound gravity of his bearing and expression forcibly reminding one of an owl. Apparently he had come to look upon himself as the sole head and master of the establishment, and the sense of responsibility had more than steadied him. The negrine propensity to frequent explosions of inconsequent laughter was not, of course, to be expected in such a sober-minded person; but he was, I think, a little too sedate for a black, for although his face would shine on warm days like polished ebony, it did not smile. Everyone in the house conspired to keep up the fiction of Nepomucino's importance; they had, in fact, conspired so long and so well, that it had very nearly ceased to be a fiction. Everybody addressed him with grave respect. Not a syllable of his long name was ever omitted—what the consequences of calling him Nepo, or Cino, or Cinito, the affectionate diminutive, would have been I am unable to say, since I never had the courage to try the experiment. It often amused me to hear Doña Mercedes calling to him from the house, and throwing the whole emphasis on the last syllable in a long, piercing crescendo—"Ne—po—mu—ci—no—o." Sometimes, when I sat in the orchard, he would come, and placing himself before me, discourse gravely about things in general, clipping his words and substituting r for l in the negro fashion, which made it hard for me to repress a smile. After winding up with a few appropriate moral reflections he would finish with the remark—"For though I am black on the surface, señor, my heart is white"; and then he would impressively lay one of his old crooked fingers on the part where the physiological curiosity was

supposed to be. He did not like being told to perform menial offices, preferring to anticipate all requests of that kind and do whatever was necessary by stealth. Sometimes I would forget this peculiarity of the old black, and tell him that I wanted him to polish my boots. He would ignore the request altogether, and talk for a few minutes of political matters, or on the uncertainty of all things mundane, and by-and-by, glancing at my boots, would remark incidentally that they required polishing, offering somewhat ostentatiously to have them done for me. Nothing would make him admit that he did these things himself. Once I tried to amuse Dolores by mimicking his speech to her, but she quickly silenced me, saying that she loved Nepomucino too well to allow even her best friend to laugh at him. He had been born when blacks were slaves in the service of her family, had carried her in his arms when she was an infant, and had seen all the male members of the house of Zelaya swept away in the wars of Reds and Whites; but in the days of their adversity his faithful dog-like affection had never failed them. It was beautiful to see her manner towards him. If she wanted a rose for her hair or dress she would not pluck it herself or allow me to get it for her, but Nepomucino must be asked to get it. Then every day she would find time to sit down in the garden by his side to tell him all the news of the village and of the country at large, discuss the position of affairs with him, and ask his advice about everything in the house.

In doors or out I generally had Dolores for a companion, and I could certainly not have had a more charm-

ing one. The civil war—though the little splutter on the Yí scarcely deserved that name yet—was her unfailing theme. She was never weary of singing her hero Santa Coloma's praises—his dauntless courage and patience in defeat; his strange romantic adventures; the innumerable disguises and stratagems he had resorted to when going about in his own country, where a price was set on his head; ever labouring to infuse fresh valour into his beaten, disheartened followers. That the governing party had any right to be in power, or possessed any virtue of any kind, or were, in fact, anything but an incubus and a curse to the Banda Oriental, she would not for one moment admit. To her mind her country always appeared like Andromeda bound on her rock and left weeping and desolate to be a prey to the abhorred Colorado monster; while ever to the deliverance of this lovely being came her glorious Perseus, swift as the winds of heaven, the lightnings of terrible vengeance flashing from his eyes, the might of the immortals in his strong right arm. Often she tried to persuade me to join this romantic adventurer, and it was hard, very hard, to resist her eloquent appeals, and perhaps it grew harder every day as the influence of her passionate beauty strengthened itself upon my heart. Invariably I took refuge in the argument that I was a foreigner, that I loved my country with an ardour equal to hers, and that by taking arms in the Banda Oriental I should at once divest myself of all an Englishman's rights and privileges. She scarcely had patience to listen to this argument, it seemed so trivial to her, and when she demanded other better

reasons I had none to offer. I dared not quote to her the words of sulky Achilles—

The distant Trojans never injured me,

for that argument would have sounded even weaker to her than the former one. She had never read Homer in any language, of course, but she would have quickly made me tell her about Achilles, and when the end came with miserable Hector dragged thrice round the walls of besieged Troy—Montevideo was called Modern Troy, she knew—then she would have turned my argument against me and bidden me go and serve the Uruguayan President as Achilles served Hector. Seeing me silent she would turn indignantly away; only for a moment, however; the bright smile would quickly return and she would exclaim, "No, no, Richard, I shall not forget my promise, though I sometimes think you try to make me do so."

It was noon: the house was quiet, for Doña Mercedes had retired after breakfast to take her unfailing siesta, leaving us to our conversation. In that spacious, cool room where I had first reposed in the house, I was lying on the sofa smoking a cigarette. Dolores, seating herself near me with her guitar, said, "Now let me play and sing you to sleep with something very soft." But the more she played and sang the further was I from unneeded slumber.

"What, not sleeping yet, Richard!" she would say with a little laugh after each song.

"Not yet, Dolores," I would reply, pretending to get drowsy. "But my eyes are getting heavy now. One

more song will send me to the region of dreams. Sing me that sweet favourite—

Desde aquel doloroso momento.

At length, finding that my sleepiness was all pretence, she refused to sing any more, and presently we drifted once more into the old subject.

"Ah yes," she replied to that argument about my nationality, which was my only shield, "I have always been taught to believe foreigners a cold, practical, calculating kind of people—so different from us. You never seemed to me like a foreigner; ah, Richard, why will you make me remember that you are not one of us! Tell me, dear friend, if a beautiful woman cried out to you to deliver her from some great misfortune or danger, would you stop to ask her nationality before going to her rescue?"

"No, Dolores; you know that if you, for instance, were in distress or danger I would fly to your side and risk my life to save you."

"I believe you, Richard. But tell me, is it less noble to help a suffering people cruelly oppressed by wicked men who have succeeded by crimes and treachery and foreign aid in climbing into power? Will you tell me that no Englishman has drawn a sword in a cause like that? Oh, friend, is not my mother-country more beautiful and worthy to be helped than any woman? Has not God given her spiritual eyes that shed tears and look for comfort; lips, sweeter than any woman's lips, that cry bitterly every day for deliverance? Can you look on the

blue skies above you and walk on the green grass where the white and purple flowers smile up at you and be deaf and blind to her beauty and to her great need? Oh, no, no, it is impossible!"

"Ah, if you were a man, Dolores, what a flame you would kindle in the hearts of your countrymen!"

"Yes, if I were a man!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet; "then I should serve my country not with words only; then I would strike and bleed for her—how willingly! Being only a weak woman, I would give my heart's blood to win one arm to aid in the sacred cause."

She stood before me with flashing eyes, her face glowing with enthusiasm; then I also rose to my feet and took her hands in mine, for I was intoxicated with her loveliness and almost ready to throw all restraints to the winds.

"Dolores," I said, "are not your words extravagant? Shall I test their sincerity? Tell me, would you give even as much as one kiss with your sweet lips to win a strong arm for your country?"

She turned crimson and cast her eyes down; then, quickly recovering herself, answered—

"What do your words mean? Speak plainly, Richard."

"I cannot speak plainer, Dolores. Forgive me if I have offended once more. Your beauty and grace and eloquence have made me forget myself."

Her hands were moist and trembling in mine, still she did not withdraw them. "No, I am not offended," she returned in a strangely low tone. "Put me to the test, Richard. Do you wish me to understand clearly that for such a favour as that you would join us?"

"I cannot say," I replied, still endeavouring to be prudent, though my heart was on fire and my words when I spoke seemed to choke me. "But, Dolores, if you would shed your blood to win one strong arm, will you think it too much to bestow the favour I spoke of in the hope of winning an arm?"

She was silent. Then drawing her closer I touched her lips with mine. But who was ever satisfied with that one touch on the lips for which the heart has craved? It was like contact with a strange celestial fire that instantly kindled my love to madness. Again and yet again I kissed her; I pressed her lips till they were dry and burned like fire, then kissed cheek, forehead, hair, and casting my arms about her strained her to my breast in a long passionate embrace; then the violence of the paroxysm was over, and with a pang I released her. She trembled: her face was whiter than alabaster, and covering it with her hands she sank down on the sofa. I sat down beside her and drew her head down on my breast, but we remained silent, only our hearts were beating very fast. Presently she disengaged herself, and without bestowing one glance on me rose and left the room.

Before long I began to blame myself bitterly for this imprudent outburst. I dared not hope to continue longer on the old familiar footing. So high-spirited and sensitive a woman as Dolores would not easily be brought to forget or forgive my conduct. She had not repelled me, she had even tacitly consented to that one first kiss, and was therefore partly to blame herself; but her extreme pallor,

her silence and cold manner had plainly shown me that I had wounded her. My passion had overcome me, and I felt that I had compromised myself. For that one first kiss I had all but promised to do a certain thing, and not to do it now seemed very dishonourable, much as I shrank from joining the Blanco rebels. I had proposed the thing myself; she had silently consented to the stipulation. I had taken my kiss and much more, and having now had my delirious evanescent joy, I could not endure the thought of meanly skulking off without paying the price.

I went out full of trouble and paced up and down in the orchard for two or three hours, hoping that Dolores might come to me there, but I saw no more of her that day. At dinner Doña Mercedes was excessively affable, showing clearly that she was not in her daughter's confidence. She informed me, simple soul! that Dolores was suffering from a grievous headache caused by taking a glass of claret at breakfast after eating a slice of watermelon, an imprudence against which she did not omit to caution me.

Lying awake that night—for the thought that I had pained and offended Dolores made it impossible for me to sleep—I resolved to join Santa Coloma immediately. That act alone would salve my conscience, and I only hoped that it would serve to win back the friendship and esteem of the woman I had learned to love too well. I had no sooner determined on taking this step than I began to see so many advantages in it that it seemed strange I had not taken it before; but we lose half our opportunities in life through too much caution. A few more days

of adventure, all the pleasanter for being spiced with danger, and I would be once more in Montevideo with a host of great and grateful friends to start me in some career in the country. Yes, I said to myself, becoming enthusiastic, once this oppressive, scandalous, and besotted Colorado party is swept with bullet and steel out of the country, as of course it will be, I shall go to Santa Coloma to lay down my sword, resuming by that act my own nationality, and as sole reward of my chivalrous conduct in aiding the rebellion, ask for his interest in getting me placed, say, at the head of some large estancia in the interior. There, possibly on one of his own establishments, I shall be in my element and happy, hunting ostriches, eating *carne con cuero*, possessing a *tropilla* of twenty cream-coloured horses for my private use, and building up a modest fortune out of hides, horns, tallow, and other native products. At break of day I rose and saddled my horse; then finding the dignified Nepomucino, who was the early bird (blackbird) of the establishment, told him to inform his mistress that I was going to spend the day with General Santa Coloma. After taking a maté from the old fellow I mounted and galloped out of the village of Molino.

Arrived at the camp, which had been moved to a distance of four or five miles from El Molino, I found Santa Coloma just ready to mount his horse to start on an expedition to a small town eight or nine leagues distant. He at once asked me to go with him, and remarked that he was very much pleased, though not surprised, at my having changed my mind about joining him. We did not

return till late in the evening, and the whole of the following day was spent in monotonous cavalry exercises. I then went to the General and requested permission to visit the Casa Blanca to bid adieu to my friends there. He informed me that he intended going to El Molino the next morning himself and would take me with him. The first thing he did on our arrival at the village was to send me to the principal storekeeper in the place, a man who had faith in the Blanco leader, and was rapidly disposing of a large stock of goods at a splendid profit, receiving in payment sundry slips of paper signed by Santa Coloma. This good fellow, who mixed politics with business, provided me with a complete and much-needed outfit, which included a broadcloth suit of clothes, soft brown hat rather broad in the brim, long riding-boots, and poncho. Going back to the official building or headquarters in the plaza I received my sword, which did not harmonise very well with the civilian costume I wore; but I was no worse off in this respect than forty-nine out of every fifty men in our little army.

In the afternoon we went together to see the ladies, and the General had a very hearty welcome from both of them, as I also had from Doña Mercedes, while Dolores received me with the utmost indifference, expressing no pleasure or surprise at seeing me wearing a sword in the cause which she had professed to have so much at heart. This was a sore disappointment, and I was also nettled at her treatment of me. After dinner, over which we sat talking some time, the General left us, telling me before doing so to join him in the plaza at five o'clock next

morning. I then tried to get an opportunity of speaking to Dolores alone, but she studiously avoided me, and in the evening there were several visitors, ladies from the town with three or four officers from the camp, and dancing and singing were kept up till towards midnight. Finding that I could not speak to her, and anxious about my appointment at five in the morning, I at length retired sorrowful and baffled to my apartment. Without undressing I threw myself on my bed, and being very much fatigued with so much riding about I soon fell asleep. When I woke the brilliant light of the moon, shining in at open window and door, made me fancy it was already daylight, and I quickly sprang up. I had no means of telling the time, except by going into the large living-room, where there was an old eight-day clock. Making my way thither, I was amazed to see, on entering it, Dolores in her white dress sitting beside the open window in a dejected attitude. She started and rose up when I entered, the extreme pallor of her face heightened by contrast with her long raven-black hair hanging unbound on her shoulders.

"Dolores, do I find you here at this hour?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," she returned coldly, sitting down again. "Do you think it very strange, Richard?"

"Pardon me for disturbing you," I said; "I came here to find out the time from your clock."

"It is two o'clock. Is that all you came for? Did you imagine I could retire to sleep without first knowing what your motive was in returning to this house? Have you then forgotten everything?"

I came to her and sat down by the window before speaking. "No, Dolores," I said; "had I forgotten, you would not have seen me here enlisted in a cause which I looked on only as your cause."

"Ah, then you have honoured the Casa Blanca with this visit not to speak to me—that you considered unnecessary — but merely to exhibit yourself wearing a sword!"

I was stung by the extreme bitterness of her tone. "You are unjust to me," I said. "Since that fatal moment when my passion overcame me I have not ceased thinking of you, grieving that I had offended you. No, I did not come to exhibit my sword, which is not worn for ornament; I came only to speak to you, Dolores, and you purposely avoided me."

"Not without reason," she retorted quickly. "Did I not sit quietly by you after you had acted in that way towards me, waiting for you to speak—to explain, and you were silent? Well, señor, I am here now, waiting again."

"This then is what I have to say," I replied. "After what passed I considered myself bound in honour to join your cause, Dolores. What more can I say except to implore your forgiveness? Believe me, dear friend, in that moment of passion I forgot everything—forgot that I—forgot that your hand was already given to another."

"Given to another? What do you mean, Richard? Who told you that?"

"General Santa Coloma."

"The General? What right has he to occupy himself

with my affairs? This is a matter that concerns myself only, and it is presumption on his part to interfere in it."

"Do you speak in that tone of your hero, Dolores? Remember that he only warned me of my danger out of pure friendship. But his warning was thrown away; my unhappy passion, the sight of your loveliness, your own incautious words, were too much for my heart."

She dropped her face on her hands and remained silent.

"I have suffered for my fault, and must suffer more. Will you not say you forgive me, Dolores?" I said, offering my hand.

She took it, but continued silent.

"Say, dearest friend, that you forgive me, that we part friends."

"Oh, Richard, must we part then?" she murmured.

"Yes—now, Dolores; for, before you are up, I must be on horseback and on my way to join the troops. The march to Montevideo will probably commence almost immediately."

"Oh, I cannot bear it!" she suddenly exclaimed, taking my hand in both hers. "Let me open my heart to you now. Forgive me, Richard, for being so angry with you, but I did not know the General had said such a thing. Believe me, he imagines more than he knows. When you took me in your arms and held me against your breast it was a revelation to me. I cannot love or give my hand to any other man. You are everything in the world to me now, Richard; must you leave me to mingle in this cruel civil strife in which all my dearest friends and relations have perished?"

She had had her revelation; I now had mine, and it was an exceedingly bitter one. I trembled at the thought of confessing my secret to her, now when she had so unmistakably responded to the passion I had insanely revealed.

Suddenly she raised her dark, luminous eyes to mine, anger and shame struggling for mastery on her pale face.

"Speak, Richard!" she exclaimed. "Your silence at this moment is an insult to me."

"For God's sake, have mercy on me, Dolores," I said. "I am not free—I have a wife."

For some moments she sat staring fixedly at me, then flinging my hand from her, covered her face. Presently she uncovered it again, for shame was overcome and cast out by anger. She rose and stood up before me, her face very white.

"You have a wife—a wife whose existence you concealed from me till this moment!" she said. "Now you ask for mercy when your secret has been wrung from you! Married, and you have dared to take me in your arms, to excuse yourself afterwards with the plea of passion! Passion—do you know what it means, traitor? Ah no; a breast like yours cannot know any great or generous emotion. Would you have dared show your face to me again had you been capable of shame even? And you judged my heart as shallow as your own, and after treating me in that way thought to win my forgiveness and admiration even by parading before me with a sword! Leave me. I can feel nothing but contempt for

you. Go; you are a disgrace to the cause you have espoused!"

I had sat utterly crushed and humiliated, not daring even to raise my sight to her face, for I felt that my own unspeakable weakness and folly had brought this tempest upon me. But there is a limit to patience, even in the most submissive mood; and when that was overpassed, then my anger blazed out all the more hotly for the penitential meekness I had preserved during the whole interview. Her words from the first had fallen like whip-cuts, making me writhe with the pain they inflicted; but that last taunt stung me beyond endurance. I, an Englishman, to be told that I was a disgrace to the Blanco cause, which I had joined in spite of my better judgment purely out of my romantic devotion to this very woman! I too was now upon my feet, and there face to face we stood for some moments, silent and trembling. At length I found my speech.

"This," I cried, "from the woman who was ready yesterday to shed her heart's blood to win one strong arm for her country? I have renounced everything, allied myself with abhorred robbers and cut-throats, only to learn that her one desire is everything to her, her divine, beautiful country nothing. I wish that a man had spoken those words to me, Dolores, so that I might have put this sword you speak of to one good use before breaking it and flinging it from me like the vile thing it is! Would to God the earth would open and swallow up this land for ever, though I sank down into hell with it for the detestable crime of taking part in its pirate wars!"

She stood perfectly still, gazing at me with widely dilated eyes, a new expression coming into her face; then when I paused for her to speak, expecting only a fresh outburst of scorn and bitterness, a strange, sorrowful smile flitted over her lips, and coming close to me she placed her hand on my shoulder.

"Oh," she said, "what a strength of passion you are capable of! Forgive me, Richard, for I have forgiven you. Ah, we were made for each other, and it can never, never be."

She dropped her head dejectedly on my shoulder. My anger vanished at those sad words; love only remained —love mingled with profoundest compassion and remorse for the pain I had inflicted. Supporting her with my arm, I tenderly stroked her dark hair, and stooping pressed my lips against it.

"Do you love me so much, Dolores," I said, "enough even to forgive the cruel, bitter words I have just spoken? Oh, I was mad—mad to say such things to you, and shall repent it all my life long! How cruelly have I wounded you with my love and my anger! Tell me, dearest Dolores, can you forgive me?"

"Yes, Richard; everything. Is there any word you can speak, any deed you can do, and I not forgive it? Does your wife love you like that—can you love her as you love me? How cruel destiny is to us! Ah, my beloved country, I was ready to shed my blood for you—just to win one strong arm to fight for you, but I did not dream that this would be the sacrifice required of me. Look, it will soon be time for you to go—we cannot

sleep now, Richard. Sit down here with me, and let us spend this last hour together with my hand in yours, for we shall never, never, never meet again."

And so sitting there hand in hand we waited for the dawn, speaking many sad and tender words to one another; and at last when we parted I held her once more unresisting to my breast, thinking, as she did, that our separation would be an eternal one.

CHAPTER XVIII

REST ON THY ROCK, ANDROMEDA!

ABOUT the stirring events of the succeeding days I have little to relate, and no reader who has suffered the malady of love in its acutest form will wonder at it. During those days I mixed with a crowd of adventurers, returned exiles, criminals, and malcontents, every one of them worth studying; the daylight hours were passed in cavalry exercises or in long expeditions about the country, while every evening beside the camp fire romantic tales enough to fill a volume were told in my hearing. But the image of Dolores was ever before my mind, so that all this crowded period, lasting nine or ten days, passed before me like a phantasmagoria, or an uneasy dream, leaving only a very confused impression on my brain. I not only grieved for the sorrow I had occasioned her, but mourned also that my own heart had so terribly betrayed me, so that for the moment the beautiful girl I had persuaded to fly from home and parents, promising her my undying affection, had ceased to be what she had been, so great was this new inconvenient passion. The General had offered me a commission in his tatterdemalion gathering, but as I had no knowledge of military matters, I had prudently

declined it, only requesting, as a special favour, that I might be employed constantly on the expeditions he sent out over the surrounding country to beat up recruits, seize arms, cattle, and horses, and to depose the little local authorities in the villages, putting creatures of his own in their places. This request had been granted, so that morning, noon, and night I was generally in the saddle.

One evening I was in the camp seated beside a large fire and gloomily staring into the flames, when the other men, who were occupied playing cards or sipping maté, hastily rose to their feet, making the salute. Then I saw the General standing near gazing fixedly at me. Motioning to the men to resume their cards, he sat down by my side.

"What is the matter with you?" he said. "I have noticed that you are like a different person since you joined us. Do you regret that step?"

"No," I answered, and then was silent, not knowing what more to say.

He looked searchingly at me. Doubtless some suspicion of the truth was in his mind; for he had gone to the Casa Blanca with me, and it was scarcely likely that his keen eyes had failed to notice the cold reception Dolores gave me on that occasion. He did not, however, touch on that matter.

"Tell me," he said at length, "what can I do for you?"

I laughed. "What can you do except to take me to Montevideo?" I replied.

"Why do you say that?" he returned quickly.

"We are not merely friends now as we were before I joined you," I said. "You are my General; I am simply one of your men."

"The friendship remains just the same, Richard. Let me know frankly what you think of this campaign, since you have now suddenly turned the current of the conversation in that direction?"

There was a slight sting in the concluding words, but I had, perhaps, deserved it. "Since you bid me speak," I said, "I, for one, feel very much disappointed at the little progress we are making. It seems to me that before you are in a position to strike, the enthusiasm and courage of your people will have vanished. You cannot get anything like a decent army together, and the few men you have are badly armed and undisciplined. Is it not plain that a march to Montevideo in these circumstances is impossible, that you will be obliged to retire into the remote and difficult places to carry on a guerilla war?"

"No," he returned; "there is to be no guerilla war. The Colorados made the Orientals sick of it, when that arch-traitor and chief of cut-throats, General Rivera, desolated the Banda for ten years. We must ride on to Montevideo soon. As for the character of my force, that is a matter it would perhaps be useless to discuss, my young friend. If I could import a well-equipped and disciplined army from Europe to do my fighting, I should do so. The Oriental farmer, unable to send to England for a threshing-machine, is obliged to go out and gather his wild mares from the plain to tread out his wheat, and

I, in like manner, having only a few scattered ranchos to draw my soldiers from, must be satisfied to do what I can with them. And now tell me, are you anxious to see something done at once—a fight, for instance, in which we might possibly be the losers?"

"Yes, that would be better than standing still. If you are strong, the best thing you can do is to show your strength."

He laughed. "Richard, you were made for an Orientál," he said, "only nature at your birth dropped you down in the wrong country. You are brave to rashness, abhor restraint, love women, and have a light heart; the Castilian gravity you have recently assumed is, I fancy, only a passing mood."

"Your words are highly complimentary and fill me with pride," I answered, "but I scarcely see their connection with the subject of our conversation."

"There is a connection, nevertheless," he returned pleasantly. "Though you refuse a commission from me. I am so convinced that you are in heart one of us that I will take you into my confidence and tell you something known to only half a dozen trusted individuals here. You rightly say that if we have strength we must show it to the country. That is what we are now about to do. A cavalry force has been sent against us and we shall engage it before two days are over. As far as I know, the forces will be pretty evenly balanced, though our enemies will, of course, be better armed. We shall choose our own ground; and should they attack us tired with a long march, or if there should be any disaffection amongst

them, the victory will be ours, and after that every Blanco sword in the Banda will be unsheathed in our cause. I need not repeat to you that in the hour of my triumph, if it ever comes, I shall not forget my debt to you; my wish is to bind you, body and heart, to this Oriental country. It is, however, possible that I may suffer defeat, and if in two days' time we are all scattered to the winds, let me advise you what to do. Do not attempt to return immediately to Montevideo, as that might be dangerous. Make your way by Minas to the southern coast; and when you reach the department of Rocha, inquire for the little settlement of Lomas de Rocha, a village three leagues west of the lake. You will find there a storekeeper, one Florentino Blanco—a Blanco in heart as well. Tell him I sent you to him, and ask him to procure you an English passport from the capital; after which it will be safe for you to travel to Montevideo. Should you ever be identified as a follower of mine, you can invent some story to account for your presence in my force. When I remember that botanical lecture you once delivered, also some other matters, I am convinced that you are not devoid of imagination."

After giving some further kind advice, he bade me good night, leaving me with a strangely unpleasant conviction in my mind that we had changed characters for the nonce, and that I had bungled as much in my new part as I had formerly done in my old. He had been sincerity itself, while I, picking up the discarded mask, had tied it on, probably upside down, for it made me feel excessively uncomfortable during our interview. To make

matters worse, I was also sure that it had quite failed to hide my countenance, and that he knew as well as I knew myself the real cause of the change he had noticed in me.

These disagreeable reflections did not trouble me long, and then I began to feel considerable excitement at the prospect of a brush with the government troops. My thoughts kept me awake most of the night; still, next morning, when the trumpet sounded its shrill reveillé close at hand, I rose quickly and in a much more cheerful mood than I had known of late. I began to feel that I was getting the better of that insane passion for Dolores which had made us both so unhappy, and when we were once more in the saddle the "Castilian gravity," to which the General had satirically alluded, had pretty well vanished.

No expeditions were sent out that day; after we had marched about twelve or thirteen miles eastward and nearer to the immense range of the Cuchilla Grande we encamped, and after the midday meal spent the afternoon in cavalry exercises.

On the next day happened the great event for which we had been preparing, and I am positive that with the wretched material he commanded, no man could have done more than Santa Coloma, though, alas! all his efforts ended in disaster. Alas, I say, not because I took, even then, any very serious interest in Oriental politics, but because it would have been greatly to my advantage if things had turned out differently. Besides, a great many poor devils who had been an unconscionable time out in

the cold would have come into power, and the rascally Colorados sent away in their turn to eat the "bitter bread" of proscription. The fable of the fox and the flies might here possibly occur to the reader: I, however, preferred to remember Lucero's fable of the tree called Montevideo, with the chattering colony in its branches, and to look upon myself as one in the majestic bovine army about to besiege the monkeys and punish them for their naughty behaviour.

Quite early in the morning we had breakfast, then every man was ordered to saddle his best horse; for every one of us was the owner of three or four steeds. I, of course, saddled the horse the General had given me, which had been reserved for important work. We mounted and proceeded at a gentle pace through a very wild and broken country still in the direction of the Cuchilla. About midday scouts came riding in and reported that the enemy were close upon us. After halting for half an hour, we again proceeded at the same gentle pace till about two o'clock, when we crossed the Cañada de San Paulo, a deep valley beyond which the plain rose to a height of about one hundred and fifty feet. In the cañada we stopped to water our horses, and there heard that the enemy were advancing along it at a rapid pace, evidently hoping to cut off our supposed retreat towards the Cuchilla. Crossing the little stream of San Paulo, we began slowly ascending the sloping plain on the further side till the highest point was gained; then turning we saw the enemy, numbering about seven hundred men, beneath us spread out in a line of extraordinary length

Up from the valley they came towards us at a brisk trot. We were then rapidly disposed in three columns, the centre one numbering about two hundred and fifty men, the others about two hundred men each. I was in one of the outside columns, within about four men from the front. My fellow-soldiers, who had hitherto been very light-hearted and chatty, had suddenly become grave and quiet, some of them even looking pale and scared. On one side of me was an irrepressible scamp of a boy about eighteen years old, a dark little fellow, with a monkey face and a feeble falsetto voice like a very old woman. I watched him take out a small sharp knife and without looking down draw it across the upper part of his surcingle three or four times; but this he did evidently only for practice, as he did not cut into the hide. Seeing me watching, he grinned mysteriously and made a sign with head and shoulders thrust forward in imitation of a person riding away at full speed, after which he restored his knife to its sheath.

"You intend cutting your surcingle and running away, little coward?" I said.

"And what are you going to do?" he returned.

"Fight," I said.

"It is the best thing you can do, Sir Frenchman," said he, with a grin.

"Listen," I said, "when the fight is over, I will look you up to thrash you for your impertinence in calling me a Frenchman."

"After the fight!" he exclaimed, with a funny grimace. "Do you mean next year? Before that distant time

arrives some Colorado will fall in love with you, and—and—and——"

Here he explained himself without words by drawing the edge of his hand briskly across his throat, then closing his eyes and making gurgling sounds, supposed to be uttered by a person undergoing the painful operation of having his throat cut.

Our colloquy was carried on in whispers, but his pantomimic performance drew on us the attention of our neighbours, and now he looked round to inform them with a grin and a nod that his Oriental wit was getting the victory. I was determined not to be put down by him, however, and tapped my revolver with my hand to call his attention to it.

"Look at this, you young miscreant," I said. "Do you not know that I and many others in this column have received orders from the General to shoot down every man who attempts to run away?"

This speech effectually silenced him. He turned as pale as his dark skin would let him and looked round like a hunted animal in search of a hole to hide in.

On my other hand a grizzly-bearded old gaucho, in somewhat tattered garments, lit a cigarette and, oblivious of everything except the stimulating fragrance of the strongest black tobacco, expanded his lungs with long inspirations to send forth thereafter clouds of blue smoke into his neighbours' faces, scattering the soothing perfume over a third portion of the army.

Santa Coloma rose equal to the occasion; swiftly riding from column to column he addressed each in turn, and

using the quaint expressive phraseology of the gauchos, which he knew so well, poured forth his denunciations of the Colorados with a fury and eloquence that brought the blood with a rush to many of his followers' pale cheeks. They were traitors, plunderers, assassins, he cried; they had committed a million crimes, but all these things were nothing, nothing compared with that one black crime which no other political party had been guilty of. By the aid of Brazilian gold and Brazilian bayonets they had risen to power; they were the infamous pensioners of the empire of slaves. He compared them to the man who marries a beautiful wife and sells her to some rich person so as to live luxuriously on the wages of his own dishonour. The foul stain which they had brought on the honour of the Banda Oriental could only be washed away with their blood. Pointing to the advancing troops, he said that when those miserable hirelings were scattered like thistle-down before the wind, the entire country would be with him, and the Banda Oriental, after half a century of degradation, free at last and for ever from the Brazilian curse.

Waving his sword, he galloped back to the front of his column greeted by a storm of *vivas*.

Then a great silence fell upon our ranks; while up the slope, their trumpets sounding merrily, trotted the enemy, till they had covered about three hundred yards of the ascending ground, threatening to close us round in an immense circle, when suddenly the order was given to charge, and led by Santa Coloma we thundered down the incline upon them.

Soldiers reading this plain unvarnished account of an Oriental battle might feel inclined to criticise Santa Coloma's tactics; for his men were, like the Arabs, horsemen and little else; they were, moreover, armed with lance and broadsword, weapons requiring a great deal of space to be used effectively. Yet, considering all the circumstances, I am sure that he did the right thing. He knew that he was too weak to meet the enemy in the usual way, pitting man against man; also that if he failed to fight, his temporary prestige would vanish like smoke and the rebellion collapse. Having decided to hazard all, and knowing that in a stand-up fight he would infallibly be beaten, his only plan was to show a bold front, mass his feeble followers together in columns and hurl them upon the enemy, hoping by this means to introduce a panic amongst his opponents and so snatch the victory.

A discharge of carbines with which we were received did us no damage. I, at any rate, saw no saddles emptied near me, and in a few moments we were dashing through the advancing lines. A shout of trumph went up from our men, for our cowardly foes were flying before us in all directions. On we rode in triumph till we reached the bottom of the hill, then we reined up, for before us was the stream of San Paulo, and the few scattered men who had crossed it and were scuttling away like hunted ostriches scarcely seemed worth chasing. Suddenly with a great shout a large body of Colorados came thundering down the hill on our rear and flank, and dismay seized upon us. The feeble efforts made by some of our officers to bring us round to face them proved unavailing. I an

utterly unable to give any clear account of what followed immediately after that, for we were all, friends and foes, mixed up for some minutes in the wildest confusion, and how I ever got out of it all without a scratch is a mystery to me. More than once I was in violent collision with Colorado men, distinguished from ours by their uniform, and several furious blows with sword and lance were aimed at me, but somehow I escaped them all. I emptied the six chambers of my Colt's revolver, but whether my bullets did any execution or not I cannot pretend to say. In the end I found myself surrounded by four of our men who were furiously spurring their horses out of the fight.

"Whip up, Captain, come with us this way," shouted one of them who knew me, and who always insisted on giving me a title to which I had no right.

As we rode away, skirting the hill towards the south, he assured me that all was lost, in proof of which he pointed to scattered bodies of our men flying from the field in all directions. Yes, we were defeated; that was plain to see, and I needed little encouragement from my fellow-runaways to spur my horse to its utmost speed. Had the falcon eye of Santa Coloma rested on me at that moment he might have added to the list of Oriental traits he had given me the un-English faculty of knowing when I was beaten. I was quite as anxious, I believe, to save my skin—*throat*, we say in the Banda Oriental—as any horseman there, not even excepting the monkey-faced boy with the squeaky voice.

If the curious reader, thirsting for knowledge, will consult the Uruguayan histories, I daresay he will find a

more scientific description of the battle of San Paulo than I have been able to give. My excuse must be, that it was the only battle—pitched or other—at which I have ever assisted, also that my position in the Blanco forces was a very humble one. Altogether I am not overproud of my soldiering performances; still, as I did no worse than Frederick the Great of Prussia, who ran away from his first battle, I do not consider that I need blush furiously. My companions took our defeat with the usual Oriental resignation. "You see," said one in explanation of his mental attitude, "there must always be one side defeated in every fight, for had we gained the day then the Colorados would have lost." There was in this remark a sound practical philosophy; it could not be controverted, it burdened our brains with no new thing, and it made us all very cheerful. For myself, I did not care very much, but could not help thinking a great deal of Dolores, who would now have a fresh grief to increase her pain.

For a distance of three or four miles we rode at a fast gallop, then on the slopes of the Cuchilla paused to breathe our horses, and, dismounting, stood for some time gazing back over the wide landscape spread out before us. At our backs rose the giant green and brown walls of the sierras, the range stretching away on either hand in violet and deep blue masses. At our feet lay the billowy green and yellow plain, vast as ocean, and channelled by innumerable streams, while one black patch on a slope far away showed us that our foes were camping on the very spot where they had overcome us. Not a cloud

appeared in the immense heavens, only low down in the west purple and rose-coloured vapours were beginning to form, staining the clear intense whity-blue sky about the sinking sun. Over all reigned deep silence; until, suddenly, a flock of orange and flame-coloured orioles with black wings swept down on a clump of bushes hard by and poured forth a torrent of wild joyous music. A strange performance! screaming notes that seemed to scream jubilant gladness to listening heaven, and notes abrupt and guttural mingling with others more clear and soul-piercing than ever human lips drew from reed or metal. It soon ended; up sprang the vocalists like a fountain of fire and fled away to their roost among the hills, then silence reigned once more. What brilliant hues, what gay fantastic music! were they indeed birds, or the glad winged inhabitants of a mystic region, resembling earth, but sweeter than earth and never entered by death, upon whose threshold I had stumbled by chance? Then, while the last rich flood of sunshine came over the earth from that red everlasting urn resting on the far horizon, I could, had I been alone, have cast myself upon the ground to adore the great God of Nature, who had given me this precious moment of life. For here the religion that languishes in crowded cities or steals shame-faced to hide itself in dim churches flourishes greatly, filling the soul with a solemn joy. Face to face with nature on the vast hills at eventide, who does not feel himself near to the Unseen?

> Out of his heart God shall not pass:
> His image stamped is on every grass.

My comrades, anxious to get through the Cuchilla, were already on horseback shouting to me to mount. One more lingering glance over that wide prospect—wide, yet how small a portion of the Banda's twenty thousand miles of everlasting verdure, watered by innumerable beautiful streams? Again the thought of Dolores swept like a moaning wind over my heart. For this rich prize, her beautiful country, how weakly and with what feeble hands had we striven! Where now was her hero, the glorious deliverer Perseus? Lying, perhaps, stark and stained with blood on yon darkening moor. Not yet was the Colorado monster overcome. "Rest on thy rock, Andromeda!" I sadly murmured, then leaping into the saddle galloped away after my retreating comrades, already half a mile away down in the shadowy mountain pass.

CHAPTER XIX

TALES OF THE PURPLE LAND

BEFORE it had been long dark, we had crossed the range and into the department of Minas. Nothing happened till towards midnight, when our horses began to be greatly distressed. My companions hoped to reach before morning an estancia, still many leagues distant, where they were known and would be allowed to lie in concealment for a few days till the storm blew over; for usually shortly after an outbreak has been put down an *indulto*, or proclamation of pardon, is issued, after which it is safe for all those who have taken arms against the constituted government to return to their homes. For the time we were, of course, outlaws, and liable to have our throats cut at any moment. Our poor horses at last became incapable even of a trot, and, dismounting, we walked on, leading them by the bridles.

About midnight we approached a watercourse, the upper part of the Rio Barriga Negra—Black Belly River—and on coming near it the tinkling of a bell attracted our attention. It is the usual thing for every man in the Banda Orientál to have one mare, called *madrina*, in his *tropilla*, or herd of geldings; the *madrina* always carries a bell attached to her neck, and at night her fore

feet are usually hobbled to prevent her wandering far from home; for the horses are always very much attached to her and will not leave her.

After listening for a few moments, we concluded that the sound came from the bell of a *madrina*, and that her fore feet were bound, for the tinkle came in violent jerks as from an animal laboriously hopping along. Proceeding to the spot, we found a *tropilla* of eleven or twelve dun-coloured horses feeding near the river. Driving them very gently towards the bank, where a sharp bend in the stream enabled us to corner them, we set to work catching fresh horses. Fortunately they were not very shy of strangers, and after we had caught and secured the *madrina*, they gathered whinnying round her, and we were not very long in selecting the five best-looking duns in the herd.

"My friends, I call this stealing," I said, though at that very moment I was engaged in hastily transferring my saddle to the animal I had secured.

"That is very interesting information," said one of my comrades.

"A stolen horse will always carry you well," said another.

"If you cannot steal a horse without compunction, you have not been properly brought up," cried the third.

"In the Banda Orientál," said the fourth, "you are not looked upon as an honest man unless you steal."

We then crossed the river and broke into a swift gallop, which we kept up till morning, reaching our destination a little while before sunrise. There was here

a fine plantation of trees not far from the house, surrounded by a deep ditch and a cactus hedge, and after we had taken maté and then breakfast at the house, where the people received us very kindly, we proceeded to conceal our horses and ourselves in the plantation. We found a comfortable little grassy hollow, partly shaded with the surrounding trees, and here we spread our rugs, and fatigued with our exertions soon dropped into a deep sleep which lasted pretty well all day. It was a pleasant day for me, for I had waking intervals during which I experienced that sensation of absolute rest of mind and body which is so exceedingly sweet after a long period of toil and anxiety. During my waking intervals I smoked cigarettes and listened to the querulous pipings of a flock of young black-headed siskins flying about from tree to tree after their parents and asking to be fed.

Occasionally the long clear cry of the venteveo, a lemon-coloured bird with black head and long beak like a kingfisher, rung through the foliage; or a flock of pecho amarillos, olive-brown birds with bright yellow vests, would visit the trees and utter their confused chorus of gay notes.

I did not think very much about Santa Coloma. Probably he had escaped, and was once more a wanderer disguised in the humble garments of a peasant; but that would be no new experience to him. The bitter bread of expatriation had apparently been his usual food, and his periodical descents upon the country had so far always ended in disaster: he had still an object to live for. But

when I remembered Dolores lamenting her lost cause and vanished peace of mind, then, in spite of the bright sunshine flecking the grass, the soft, warm wind fanning my face and whispering in the foliage overhead, and the merry-throated birds that came to visit me, a pang was in my heart, and tears came to my eyes.

When evening came we were all wide awake and sat till a very late hour round the fire we had made in the hollow, sipping maté and conversing. We were all in a talkative mood that evening, and after the ordinary subjects of Banda Orientál conversation had been exhausted, we drifted into matters extraordinary — wild creatures of strange appearance and habits, apparitions, and marvellous adventures.

"The manner in which the lampalagua captures its prey is very curious," said one of the company, named Rivarola, a stout man with an immense fierce-looking black beard and moustache, but who was very mild-eyed and had a gentle, cooing voice.

We had all heard of the lampalagua, a species of boa found in these countries, with a very thick body and extremely sluggish in its motions. It preys on the larger rodents, and captures them, I believe, by following them into their burrows, where they cannot escape from its jaws by running.

"I will tell you what I once witnessed, for I have never seen a stranger thing," continued Rivarola. "Riding one day through a forest I saw some distance before me a fox sitting on the grass watching my approach. Suddenly I saw it spring high up into the air, uttering a great

scream of terror, then fall back upon the earth, where it lay for some time growling, struggling, and biting as if engaged in deadly conflict with some invisible enemy. Presently it began to move away through the wood, but very slowly and still frantically struggling. It seemed to be getting exhausted, its tail dragged, the mouth foamed, and the tongue hung out, while it still moved on as if drawn by an unseen cord. I followed, going very close to it, but it took no notice of me. Sometimes it dug its claws into the ground or seized a twig or stalk with its teeth, and it would then remain resting for a few moments till the twig gave away, when it would roll over many times on the ground, loudly yelping, but still dragged onwards. Presently I saw in the direction we were going a huge serpent, thick as a man's thigh, its head lifted high above the grass, and motionless as a serpent of stone. Its cavernous, blood-red mouth was gaping wide, and its eyes were fixed on the struggling fox. When about twenty yards from the serpent, the fox began moving very rapidly over the ground, its struggles growing feebler every moment, until it seemed to fly through the air, and in an instant was in the serpent's mouth. Then the reptile dropped its head and began slowly swallowing its prey."

"And you actually witnessed this yourself?" said I.

"With these eyes," he returned, indicating the orbs in question by pointing at them with the tube of the maté-cup he held in his hand. "This was the only occasion on which I have actually seen the lampalagua take its prey, but its manner of doing it is well known to every-

one from hearsay. You see, it draws an animal towards it by means of its power of suction. Sometimes, when the animal attacked is very strong or very far off—say two thousand yards—the serpent becomes so inflated with the quantity of air inhaled while drawing the victim towards it——"

"That it bursts?" I suggested.

"That it is obliged to stop drawing to blow the wind out. When this happens, the animal, finding itself released from the drawing force, instantly sets off at full speed. Vain effort! The serpent has no sooner discharged the accumulated wind with a report like a cannon——"

"No, no, like a musket! I have heard it myself," interrupted Blas Aria, one of the listeners.

"Like a musket, than it once more brings its power of suction to bear; and in this manner the contest continues until the victim is finally drawn into the monster's jaws. It is well known that the lampalagua is the strongest of all God's creatures, and that if a man, stripped to the skin, engages one, and conquers it by sheer muscular strength, the serpent's power goes into him, after which he is invincible."

I laughed at this fable, and was severely rebuked for my levity.

"I will tell you the strangest thing that ever befell me," said Blas Aria. "I happened to be travelling alone —for reasons—on the northern frontier. I crossed the river Yaguaron into Brazilian territory, and for a whole day rode through a great marshy plain, where the reeds

were dead and yellow, and the water shrunk into muddy pools. It was a place to make a man grow weary of life. When the sun was going down, and I began to despair of getting to the end of this desolation, I discovered a low hovel made of mud and thatched with rushes. It was about fifteen yards long, with only one small door, and seemed to be uninhabited, for no person answered me when I rode round it shouting aloud. I heard a grunting and squealing within, and by-and-by a sow, followed by a litter of young pigs, came out, looked at me, then went in again. I would have ridden on, but my horses were tired; besides, a great storm with thunder and lightning was coming up, and no other shelter appeared in sight. I therefore unsaddled, loosed my horses to feed, and took my gear into the hovel. The room I entered was so small that the sow and her young occupied all the floor; there was, however, another room, and opening the door, which was closed, I went into it and found that it was very much larger than the first; also, that it contained a dirty bed made of skins in one corner, while on the floor was a heap of ashes and a black pot. There was nothing else except old bones, sticks, and other rubbish littering the floor. Afraid of being caught unawares by the owner of this foul den, and finding nothing to eat in it, I returned to the first room, turned the pigs out of doors, and sat down on my saddle to wait. It was beginning to get dark when a woman, bringing in a bundle of sticks, suddenly appeared at the door. Never, sirs, have I beheld a fouler, more hideous object than this person. Her face was hard, dark, and rough like the bark of the

ñandubuy tree, while her hair, which covered her head and shoulders in a tangled mass, was of a dry earthy colour. Her body was thick and long, yet she looked like a dwarf, for she scarcely had any legs, only enormous knees and feet; and her garments were old ragged horse-rugs tied round her body with thongs of hide. She stared at me out of a pair of small black rat eyes, then, setting down her bundle, asked me what I wanted. I told her I was a tired traveller, and wanted food and shelter. 'Shelter you can have: food there is none,' she said; then, taking up her sticks, she passed to the inner room and secured it with a bolt on the inside. She had not inspired me with love, and there was little danger of my attempting to intrude on her there. It was a black, stormy night, and very soon the rain began to fall in torrents. Several times the sow, with her young pigs loudly squealing, came in for shelter, and I was forced to get up and beat them out with my whip. At length, through the mud partition separating the two rooms, I heard the crackling of a fire which the vile woman was lighting; and, before long, through the chinks came the savoury smell of roast meat. That surprised me greatly, for I had searched the room and failed to find anything to eat in it. I concluded that she had brought in the meat under her garments, but where she had got it was a mystery. At length I began to doze. There were many sounds in my ear as of thunder and wind, the pigs grunting at the door, and the crackling of the fire in the hag's room. But by-and-by other sounds seemed to mingle with these—voices of several persons talking, laughing,

and singing. At length I became wide awake, and found that these voices proceeded from the next room. Some person was playing a guitar and singing, then others were loudly talking and laughing. I tried to peep through the cracks in the door and partition, but could not see through them. High up in the middle of the wall there was one large crack through which I was sure the interior could be seen, so much red firelight streamed through it. I placed my saddle against the partition, and all my rugs folded small, one above the other, until I had heaped them as high as my knees. Standing on my toes on this pile, and carefully clinging to the wall with my finger-nails, I managed to bring my eyes to a level with the crack, and peeped through it. The room inside was brightly lighted by a big wood fire burning at one end, while on the floor a large crimson cloak was spread, on which the people I had heard were sitting with some fruit and bottles of wine before them. There was the foul hag looking almost as tall sitting as she had appeared when standing; she was playing on a guitar and singing a ballad in Portuguese. Before her on the cloak lay a tall well-formed negro woman, wearing only a narrow white cloth round her loins, and broad silver armlets on her round black arms. She was eating a banana, and against her knees, which were drawn up, sat a beautiful girl about fifteen years old, with a dark pale face. She was dressed in white, her arms were bare, and round her head she wore a gold band keeping back her black hair, which fell unbound on her back. Before her, on his knees on the cloak, was an old man with a face brown

and wrinkled as a walnut, and beard white as thistle-down. With one of his hands he was holding the girl's arm, and with the other offering her a glass of wine. All this I saw at one glance, and then all of them together turned their eyes up at the crack as if they knew that someone was watching them. I started back in alarm, and fell with a crash to the ground. Then I heard loud screams of laughter, but I dared not attempt to look in on them again. I took my rugs to the further side of the room, and sat down to wait for morning. The talking and laughter continued for about two hours, then it gradually died away, the light faded from the chinks, and all was dark and silent. No person came out; and at last, overcome with drowsiness, I fell asleep. It was day when I woke. I rose and walked round the hovel, and finding a crack in the wall, I peered into the hag's room. It looked just as I had seen it the day before; there was the pot and pile of ashes, and in the corner the brutish woman lying asleep in her skins. After that I got on to my horse and rode away. May I never again have such an experience as I had that night."

Something was then said about witchcraft by the others, all looking very solemn.

"You were very hungry and tired that night," I ventured to remark, "and perhaps after the woman locked her door you went to sleep and dreamed all that about people eating fruit and playing on the guitar."

"Our horses were tired and we were flying for our lives yesterday," returned Blas contemptuously. "Perhaps it made us dream that we caught five dun horses to carry us."

"When a person is incredulous, it is useless arguing with him," said Mariano, a small dark grey-haired man. "I will now tell you a strange adventure I had when I was a young man; but remember I do not put a blunderbuss to any man's breast to compel him to believe me. For what is, is; and let him that disbelieves shake his head till he shakes it off, and it falls to the ground like a cocoanut from the tree.

"After I got married I sold my horses, and taking all my money purchased two ox-carts, intending to make my living by carrying freight. One cart I drove myself, and to drive the other I hired a boy whom I called Mula, though that was not the name his godfathers gave him, but because he was stubborn and sullen as a mule. His mother was a poor widow, living near me, and when she heard about the ox-carts she came to me with her son and said, 'Neighbour Mariano, for your mother's sake, take my son and teach him to earn his bread, for he is a boy that loves not to do anything.' So I took Mula and paid the widow for his services after each journey. When there was no freight to be had I sometimes went to the lagoons to cut rushes, and loading the carts with them we would go about the country to sell the rushes to those who required them to thatch their houses. Mula loved not this work. Often when we were all day wading up to our thighs in the water, cutting the rushes down close to their roots, then carrying them in large bundles on our shoulders to land, he would cry, complaining bitterly of his hard lot. Sometimes I thrashed him, for it angered me to see a poor boy so fastidious: then he would

curse me and say that some day he would have his revenge. 'When I am dead,' he often told me, 'my ghost will come to haunt and terrify you for all the blows you have given me.' This always made me laugh.

"At last, one day, while crossing a deep stream, swollen with rains, my poor Mula fell down from his perch on the shaft and was swept away by the current into deep water and drowned. Well, sirs, about a year after that event I was out in search of a couple of strayed oxen when night overtook me a long distance from home. Between me and my house there was a range of hills running down to a deep river, so close that there was only a narrow passage to get through, and for a long distance there was no other opening. When I reached the pass I fell into a narrow path with bushes and trees growing on either side; here, suddenly, the figure of a young man stepped out from the trees and stood before me. It was all in white—poncho, *chiripà*, drawers, even its boots, and wore a broad-brimmed straw hat on its head. My horse stood still trembling; nor was I less frightened, for my hair rose up on my head like bristles on a pig's back; and the sweat broke out on my face like raindrops. Not a word said the figure; only it remained standing still with arms folded on its breast, preventing me from passing. Then I cried out, 'In Heaven's name, who are you, and what do you want with Mariano Montes de Oca, that you bar his path?' At this speech it laughed: then it said, 'What, does my old master not know me? I am Mula; did I not often tell you that some day I should return to pay you out for all the

thrashings you gave me? Ah, Master Mariano, you see I have kept my word!' Then it began to laugh again. 'May ten thousand curses light on your head!' I shouted. 'If you wish for my life, Mula, take it and be for ever damned; or else let me pass, and go back to Satan, your master, and tell him from me to keep a stricter watch on your movements; for why should the stench of purgatory be brought to my nostrils before my time! And now, hateful ghost, what more have you got to say to me?' At this speech the ghost shouted with laughter, slapping its thighs, and doubling itself up with mirth. At last, when it was able to speak, it said, 'Enough of this fooling, Mariano. I did not intend frightening you so much; and it is no great matter if I have laughed a little at you now, for you have often made me cry. I stopped you because I had something important to say. Go to my mother and tell her you have seen and spoken with me; tell her to pay for another mass for my soul's repose, for after that I shall be out of purgatory. If she has no money lend her a few dollars for the mass, and I will repay you, old man, in another world.'

"This it said and vanished. I lifted my whip but needed not to strike my horse, for not a bird that has wings could fly faster than he now flew with me on his back. No path was before me, nor did I know where we were going. Through rushes and through thickets, over burrows of wild animals, stones, rivers, marshes, we flew as if all the devils that are on the earth and under it were at our heels; and when the horse stopped it was at my own door. I stayed not to unsaddle him, but cutting

the surcingle with my knife left him to shake the saddle off; then with the bridle I hammered on the door shouting to my wife to open. I heard her fumbling for the tinder-box. 'For the love of Heaven, woman, strike no light,' I cried. '*Santa Barbara bendita!* have you seen a ghost?' she exclaimed, opening to me. 'Yes,' I replied, rushing in and bolting the door, 'and had you struck a light you would now have been a widow.'

"For thus it is, sirs, the man who after seeing a ghost is confronted with a light immediately drops down dead."

I made no sceptical remarks, and did not even shake my head. The circumstances of the encounter were described by Mariano with such graphic power and minuteness that it was impossible not to believe his story. Yet some things in it afterwards struck me as somewhat absurd; that straw hat, for instance, and it also seemed strange that a person of Mula's disposition should have been so much improved in temper by his sojourn in a warmer place.

"Talking of ghosts," said Laralde, the other man—but proceeded no further, for I interrupted him. Laralde was a short, broad-chested man, with bow legs and bushy grey whiskers; he was called by his familiars Lechuza (owl) on account of his immense round tawny-coloured eyes, which had a tremendous staring power in them.

I thought we had had enough of the supernatural by this time.

"My friend," I said, "pardon me for interrupting you; but there will be no sleep for us to-night if we have any more stories about spirits from the other world"

"Talking of ghosts," resumed Lechuza, without noticing my remark, and this nettled me; so I cut in once more—

"I protest that we have heard quite enough about them," I said. "This conversation was only to be about rare and curious things. Now, visitors from the other world are very common. I put it to you, my friends—have you not all seen more ghosts than lampalaguas drawing foxes with their breath?"

"I have seen that once only," said Rivarola gravely. "I have often seen ghosts."

The others also confessed to having seen more than one ghost apiece.

Lechuza sat inattentive, smoking his cigarette, and when we had all done speaking began again—

"Talking of ghosts——"

Nobody interrupted him this time, though he seemed to expect it, for he made a long, deliberate pause.

"Talking of ghosts," he repeated, staring around him triumphantly, "I once had an encounter with a strange being that was *not* a ghost. I was a young man then—young and full of the fire, strength and courage of youth—for what I am now going to relate happened over twenty years ago. I had been playing cards at a friend's house, and left it at midnight to ride to my father's house, a distance of five leagues. I had quarrelled that evening and left a loser, burning with anger against the man who had cheated and insulted me, and with whom I was not allowed to fight. Vowing vengeance on him, I rode away at a fast gallop; the night being serene, and almost as

light as day, for the moon was at its full. Suddenly I saw before me a huge man sitting on a white horse, which stood perfectly motionless directly in my path. I dashed on till I came near him, then shouted aloud, 'Out of my path, friend, lest I ride over you'; for I was still raging in my heart.

"Seeing that he took no notice of my words, I dug my spurs into my horse and hurled myself against him; then at the very moment my horse struck his with a tremendous shock, I brought down my iron whip-handle with all the force that was in me upon his head. The blow rang as if I had struck upon an anvil, while at the same moment he, without swerving, clutched my cloak with both hands. I could feel that they were bony, hard hands, armed with long, crooked, sharp talons like an eagle's, which pierced through my cloak into my flesh. Dropping my whip, I seized him by the throat, which seemed scaly and hard, between my hands, and thus, locked together in a desperate struggle, we swayed this way and that, each trying to drag the other from his seat till we came down together with a crash upon the earth. In a moment we were disengaged and on our feet. Quick as lightning flashed out his long, sharp weapon, and finding I was too late to draw mine I hurled myself against him, seizing his armed hand in both mine before he could strike. For a few moments he stood still, glaring at me out of a pair of eyes that shone like burning coals; then mad with rage, he flung me off my feet and whirled me round and round like a ball in a sling, and finally cast me from him to a distance of a hundred yards, so great was his strength.

I was launched with tremendous force into the middle of some thorny bushes, but had no sooner recovered from the shock than out I burst with a yell of rage and charged him again. For, you will hardly believe it, sirs, by some strange chance I had carried away his weapon, firmly grasped in my hands. It was a heavy two-edged dagger, sharp as a needle, and while I grasped the hilt I felt the strength and fury of a thousand fighting-men in me. As I advanced he retreated before me, until, seizing the topmost boughs of a great thorny bush he swung his body to one side and wrenched it out of the earth by the roots. Swinging the bush with the rapidity of a whirlwind round his head, he advanced against me and dealt a blow that would have crushed me had it descended on me; but it fell too far, for I had dodged under it to close with him and delivered a stab with such power that the long weapon was buried to its hilt in his bosom. He uttered a deafening yell, and at the same moment a torrent of blood spouted forth, scalding my face like boiling water, and drenching my clothes through to the skin. For a moment I was blinded; but when I had dashed the blood from my eyes and looked round he had vanished, horse and all.

"Then mounting my horse I rode home and told everyone what had happened, showing the knife, which I still carried in my hand. Next day all the neighbours gathered at my house, and we rode in company to the spot where the fight had taken place. There we found the bush torn up by the roots, and all the earth about it ploughed up where we had fought. The ground was also dyed with

blood for several yards round, and where it had fallen the grass was withered up to the roots, as if scorched with fire. We also picked up a cluster of hairs—long, wiry, crooked hairs, barbed at the ends like fish-hooks; also three or four scales like fish-scales, only rougher, and as large as doubloons. The spot where the fight took place is now called *La Cañada del Diablo*, and I have heard that since that day the devil has never appeared corporeally to fight any man in the Banda Oriental."

Lechuza's narrative gave great satisfaction. I said nothing, feeling half stupid with amazement, for the man apparently told it in the full conviction that it was true, while the other listeners appeared to accept every word of it with the most implicit faith. I began to feel very melancholy, for evidently they expected something from me now, and what to tell them I knew not. It went against my conscience to be the only liar amongst these exceedingly veracious Orientals, and so I could not think of inventing anything.

"My friends," I began at length, "I am only a young man; also a native of a country where marvellous things do not often happen, so that I can tell you nothing to equal in interest the stories I have heard. I can only relate a little incident which happened to me in my own country before I left it. It is trivial, perhaps, but will lead me to tell you something about London—that great city you have all heard of."

"Yes, we have heard of London; it is in England, I believe. Tell us your story about London," said Blas encouragingly.

"I was very young—only fourteen years old," I continued, flattering myself that my modest introduction had not been ineffective, "when one evening I came to London from my home. It was in January, in the middle of winter, and the whole country was white with snow."

"Pardon me, Captain," said Blas, "but you have got the cucumber by the wrong end. We say that January is in summer."

"Not in my country, where the seasons are reversed," I said. "When I rose next morning it was dark as night, for a black fog had fallen upon the city."

"A black fog!" exclaimed Lechuza.

"Yes, a black fog that would last all day and make it darker than night, for though the lamps were lighted in the streets they gave no light."

"Demons!" exclaimed Rivarola; "there is no water in the bucket. I must go to the well for some or we shall have none to drink in the night."

"You might wait till I finish," I said.

"No, no, Captain," he returned. "Go on with your story; we must not be without water." And taking up the bucket he trudged off.

"Finding it was going to be dark all day," I continued, "I determined to go a little distance away, not out of London, you will understand, but about three leagues from my hotel to a great hill, where I thought the fog would not be so dark, and where there is a palace of glass."

"A palace of glass!" repeated Lechuza, with his immense round eyes fixed sternly on me.

"Yes, a palace of glass—is there anything so wonderful in that?"

"Have you any tobacco in your pouch, Mariano?" said Blas. "Pardon, Captain, for speaking, but the things you are telling require a cigarette, and my pouch is empty."

"Very well, sirs, perhaps you will now allow me to proceed," I said, beginning to feel rather vexed at these constant interruptions. "A palace of glass large enough to hold all the people in this country."

"The Saints assist us! Your tobacco is dry as ashes, Mariano," exclaimed Blas.

"That is not strange," said the other, "for I have had it three days in my pocket. Proceed, Captain. A palace of glass large enough to hold all the people in the world. And then?"

"No, I shall not proceed," I returned, losing my temper. "It is plain to see that you do not wish to hear my story. Still, sirs, from motives of courtesy you might have disguised your want of interest in what I was about to relate; for I have heard it said that the Orientals are a polite people."

"There you are saying too much, my friend," broke in Lechuza. "Remember that we were speaking of actual experiences, not inventing tales of black fogs and glass palaces and men walking on their heads, and I know not what other marvels."

"Do you know that what I am telling you is untrue?" I indignantly asked.

"Surely, friend, you do not consider us such simple

persons in the Banda Orientál as not to know truth from fable?"

And this from the fellow who had just told us of his tragical encounter with Apollyon, a yarn which quite put Bunyan's narrative in the shade! It was useless talking; my irritation gave place to mirth, and stretching myself out on the grass I roared with laughter. The more I thought of Lechuza's stern rebuke the louder I laughed, until I yelled with laughter, slapping my thighs and doubling myself up after the manner of Mariano's hilarious visitor from purgatory. My companions never smiled. Rivarola came back with the bucket of water and after staring at me for some time said, "If the tears, which they say always follow laughter, come in the same measure then we shall have to sleep in the wet."

This increased my mirth.

"If the whole country is to be informed of our hiding-place," said Blas the timid, "we were putting ourselves to an unnecessary trouble by running away from San Paulo."

Fresh screams of laughter greeted this protest.

"I once knew a man," said Mariano, "who had a most extraordinary laugh; you could hear it a league away, it was so loud. His name was Aniceto, but we called him El Burro on account of his laugh, which sounded like the braying of an ass. Well, sirs, he one day burst out laughing, like the Captain here, at nothing at all, and fell down dead. You see, the poor man had aneurism of the heart."

At this I fairly yelled, then, feeling quite exhausted, I

looked apprehensively at Lechuza, for this important member of the quartet had not yet spoken.

With his immense unspeakably serious eyes fixed on me he remarked quietly. "And this, my friends, is the man who says it is wrong to steal horses!"

But I was past shrieking now. Even this rich specimen of topsy-turvey Banda Oriental morality only evoked a faint gurgling as I rolled about on the grass, my sides aching, as if I had received a good bruising.

CHAPTER XX

A GHASTLY GIFT

DAY had just dawned when I rose to join Mariano at the fire he had already kindled to heat the water for his early maté. I did not like the idea of lying there concealed amongst the trees like some hunted animal for an indefinite time; moreover, I had been advised by Santa Coloma to proceed directly to the Lomas de Rocha, on the south coast, in the event of a defeat, and this now seemed to me the best thing to do. It had been very pleasant lying there "under the greenwood tree," while those veracious stories of hags, lampalaguas, and apparitions had proved highly entertaining; but a long spell, a whole month perhaps, of that kind of life was not to be thought of; and if I did not get to Rocha now, before the rural police were set to catch runaway rebels, it would perhaps be impossible to do so later on. I determined, therefore, to go my own way, and after drinking bitter maté, I caught and saddled the dun horse. I really had not deserved the severe censure Lechuza had passed on me the previous evening in reference to horse-stealing, for I had taken the dun with very little more compunction than one is accustomed to feel in England when "borrowing" an umbrella on a rainy

day. To all people in all parts of the world, a time comes when to appropriate their neighbour's goods is held not only justifiable, but even meritorious: to Israelites in Egypt, Englishmen under a cloud in their own moist island, and to Orientals running away after a fight. By keeping the dun over thirty hours in my possession I had acquired a kind of prescriptive right to it, and now began to look on it as my very own; subsequent experience of his endurance and other good qualities enables me to endorse the Oriental saying that a "stolen horse carries you well."

Bidding farewell to my companions in defeat, who had certainly not been frightened out of their imaginations, I rode forth just when it was beginning to grow light. Roads and houses I studiously avoided, travelling on at an easy gallop, which took me about ten miles an hour, till noon; then I rested at a small rancho, where I fed and watered my horse and recruited my own energies with roast beef and bitter maté. On again till dark; by that time I had covered about forty miles and began to feel both hungry and tired. I had passed several ranchos and estancia-houses, but was shy of seeking entertainment at any of them, and so went further only to fare worse. When the brief twilight was darkening to night I came upon a broad cart-track, leading, I suppose, to Montevideo from the eastern part of the country, and seeing a long, low rancho near it, which I recognised as a *pulpería*, or store, by the flagstaff planted before it, I resolved to purchase some refreshment for myself, then to ride on a mile or two and spend the night under the

stars—a safe roof if an airy one. Tying my horse to the gate, I went into the porch-like projection at the end of the rancho, which I found divided from the interior by the counter, with its usual grating of thick iron bars to protect the treasures of gin, rum, and comestibles from drunken or quarrelsome customers. As soon as I came into the porch I began to regret having alighted at the place, for there, standing at the counter, smoking and drinking, were about a dozen very rough-looking men. Unfortunately for me, they had tied their horses under the shadow of a clump of trees some distance from the gate, so that I had missed seeing them on my arrival. Once amongst them, however, my only plan was to disguise my uneasiness, be very polite, get my refreshments, then make my escape as speedily as possible. They stared rather hard at me, but returned my salutation courteously; then going to a disengaged corner of the counter I rested my left elbow on it and called for bread, a box of sardines, and a tumbler of wine.

"If you will join me, señores, the table is spread," said I; but they all declined my invitation with thanks, and I began to eat my bread and sardines.

They appeared to be all persons living in the immediate neighbourhood, for they addressed each other familiarly and were conversing about love matters. One of them, however, soon dropped out of the conversation, and edging away from the others stood a little space apart leaning against the wall on the side of the porch furthest from me. I began to notice this man very particularly, for it was plain to see that I had excited his

interest in an extraordinary manner, and I did not like his scrutiny. He was, without exception, the most murderous-looking villain I have ever had the misfortune to meet: that was the deliberate opinion I came to before I formed a closer acquaintance with him. He was a broad-chested, powerful-looking man of medium height; his hands he kept concealed under the large cloth poncho he wore, and he had on a slouch hat that just allowed his eyes to be seen under the rim. They were truculent, yellowish-green eyes, that seemed to grow fiery and dim and fiery again by turns, yet never for a single instant were they averted from my face. His black hair hung to his shoulders, and he also had a bristly moustache, which did not conceal his brutal mouth, nor was there any beard to hide his broad, swarthy jowl. His jaws were the only part of him that had any motion, while he stood there, still as a bronze statue, watching me. At intervals he ground his teeth, after which he would slap his lips together two or three times, while a slimy froth, most sickening to see, gathered at the corners of his mouth.

"Gandara, you are not drinking," said one of the gauchos, turning to him. He shook his head slightly without speaking or taking his eyes off my face; whereupon the man who had spoken smiled and resumed his conversation with the others.

The long, intense, soul-trying scrutiny this brutal wretch had subjected me to came to a very sudden end. Quick as lightning a long, broad knife flashed out from its concealment under his poncho, and with one cat-

like bound he was before me, the point of his horrid weapon touching my poncho just over the pit of my stomach.

"Do not move, rebel," he said in a husky voice. "If you move one hair's-breadth, that moment you die."

The other men all ceased talking and looked on with some interest, but did not offer to interfere or make any remark.

For one moment I felt as if an electric shock had gone through me, and then instantly I was calm—never, in fact, have I felt more calm and collected than at that terrible moment. 'Tis a blessed instinct of self-preservation which nature has provided us with; feeble, timid men possess it in common with the strong and brave, just as weak, persecuted wild animals have it as well as those that are fierce and bloodthirsty. It is the calm which comes without call when death suddenly and unexpectedly rises up to stare us in the face; it tells us that there is one faint chance which a premature attempt to escape or even a slight agitation will destroy.

"I have no wish to move, friend," I said, "but I am curious to know why you attack me?"

"Because you are a rebel. I have seen you before, you are one of Santa Coloma's officers. Here you shall stand with this knife touching you till you are arrested, or else with this knife in you here you shall die."

"You are making a mistake," I said.

"Neighbours," said he, speaking to the others, but without taking his eyes from my face, "will you tie this man hand and foot while I stand before him to prevent

him from drawing any weapon he may have concealed under his poncho?"

"We have not come here to arrest travellers," returned one of the men. "If he is a rebel it is no concern of ours. Perhaps you are mistaken, Gandara."

"No, no, I am not mistaken," he returned. "He shall not escape. I saw him at San Paulo with these eyes—when did they ever deceive me? If you refuse to assist me, then go one of you to the Alcalde's house and tell him to come without delay, while I keep guard here."

After a little discussion one of the men offered to go and inform the Alcalde. When he had left, I said, "My friend, may I finish my meal? I am hungry and had just begun to eat when you drew your knife against me."

"Yes; eat," he said; "only keep your hands well up so that I can see them. Perhaps you have a weapon at your waist."

"I have not," I said, "for I am an inoffensive person and do not require weapons."

"Tongues were made to lie," he returned, truly enough. "If I see you drop your hand lower than the counter I shall rip you up. We shall then be able to see whether you digest your food or not."

I began to eat and sip my wine, still with those brutal eyes on my face and the keen knife-point touching my poncho. There was now a ghastly look of horrible excitement on his face, while his teeth-grinding performances became more frequent and the slimy froth dropped continually from the corners of his mouth on to his bosom. I dared not look at the knife, because a terrible

impulse to wrest it out of his hands kept rising in me. It was almost too strong to be overcome, yet I knew that even the slightest attempt at escape would be fatal to me; for the fellow was evidently thirsty for my blood and only wanted an excuse to run me through. But what, I thought, if he were to grow tired of waiting, and, carried away by his murderous instincts, to plunge his weapon into me? In that case I should die like a dog without having availed myself of my one chance of escape through over-caution. These thoughts were maddening, still through it all I laboured to observe an outwardly calm demeanour.

My supper was done. I began to feel strangely weak and nervous. My lips grew dry; I was intensely thirsty and longed for more wine, yet dared not take it for fear that in my excited state even a very moderate amount of alcohol might cloud my brain.

"How long will it take your friend to return with the Alcalde?" I asked at length.

Gandara made no reply. "A long time," said one of the other men. "I, for one, cannot wait till he comes," and after that he took his departure. One by one they now began to drop away till only two men besides Gandara remained in the porch. Still that murderous wretch kept before me like a tiger watching its prey, or rather like a wild boar, gnashing and foaming, and ready to rip up its adversary with horrid tusk.

At length I made an appeal to him, for I began to despair of the Alcalde coming to deliver me. "Friend," I said, "if you will allow me to speak, I can convince you

that you are mistaken. I am a foreigner, and know nothing about Santa Coloma."

"No, no," he interrupted, pressing the knife-point warningly against my stomach, then suddenly withdrawing it as if about to plunge it into me. "I know you are a rebel. If I thought the Alcalde were not coming I would run you through at once and cut your throat afterwards. It is a virtue to kill a Blanco traitor, and if you do not go bound hand and foot from here then here you must die. What, do you dare to say that I did not see you at San Paulo—that you are not an officer of Santa Coloma? Look, rebel, I will swear on this cross that I saw you there."

Suiting the action to the word, he raised the hilt of the weapon to his lips to kiss the guard, which with the handle formed a cross. That pious action was the first slip he had made, and gave the first opportunity that had come to me during all that terrible interview. Before he had ceased speaking the conviction that my time had come flashed like lightning through my brain. Just as his slimy lips kissed the hilt, my right hand dropped to my side and grasped the handle of my revolver under my poncho. He saw the movement and very quickly recovered the handle of his knife. In another second of time he would have driven the blade through me; but that second was all I now required. Straight from my waist, and from under my poncho, I fired. His knife fell ringing on to the floor; he swerved, then fell back, coming to the ground with a heavy thud. Over his falling body I leaped, and almost before he had touched

the ground was several yards away, then wheeling round, I found the other two men rushing out after me.

"Back!" I shouted, covering the foremost of the two with my revolver.

They instantly stood still.

"We are not following you, friend," said one, "but only wish to get out of the place."

"Back, or I fire!" I repeated, and then they retreated into the porch. They had stood by unconcerned while their cut-throat comrade Gandara was threatening my life, so that I naturally felt angry with them.

I sprang upon my horse, but instead of riding away at once stood for some minutes by the gate watching the two men. They were kneeling by Gandara, one opening his clothes to look for the wound, the other holding a flaring candle over his ashen corpse-like face.

"Is he dead?" I asked.

One of the men looked up and answered, "It appears so."

"Then," I returned, "I make you a present of his carcass."

After that, digging my spurs into my horse, I galloped away.

Some readers might imagine, after what I have related, that my sojourn in the Purple Land had quite brutalised me; I am happy to inform them that it was not so. Whatever a man's individual character may happen to be, he has always a strong inclination in him to reply to an attack in the spirit in which it is made. He does not call the person who playfully ridicules his foibles a

whitened sepulchre or an unspeakable scoundrel, and the same principle holds good when it comes to actual physical fighting. If a French gentleman were to call me out, I daresay I should go to the encounter twirling my moustache, bowing down to the ground, all smiles and compliments; and that I should select my rapier with a pleasant kind of feeling, like that experienced by the satirist about to write a brilliant article while picking out a pen with a suitable nib. On the other hand, if a murderous brute with truculent eyes and gnashing teeth attempts to disembowel me with a butcher's knife, the instinct of self-preservation comes out in all its old original ferocity, inspiring the heart with such implacable fury that after spilling his blood I could spurn his loathsome carcass with my foot. I do not wonder at myself for speaking those savage words. That he was past recall seemed certain, yet not a shade of regret did I feel at his death. Joy at the terrible retribution I had been able to inflict on the murderous wretch was the only emotion I experienced when galloping away into the darkness—such joy that I could have sung and shouted aloud had it not seemed imprudent to indulge in such expressions of feeling.

CHAPTER XXI

LIBERTY AND DIRT

AFTER my terrible adventure I did not rest badly that night, albeit I slept on an empty stomach (the sardines counting as nothing), and under the vast, void sky, powdered with innumerable stars. And when I proceeded next day on my journey, *God's light*, as the pious Orientals call the first wave of glory with which the rising sun floods the world, had never seemed so pleasant to my eyes, nor had earth ever looked fresher or lovelier, with the grass and bushes everywhere hung with starry lace, sparkling with countless dewy gems, which the epeiras had woven overnight. Life seemed very sweet to me on that morning, so softening my heart that when I remembered the murderous wretch who had endangered it I almost regretted that he was now probably blind and deaf to nature's sweet ministrations.

Before noon I came to a large thatched house, with clumps of shady trees growing near it, also surrounded with brushwood fences and sheep and cattle enclosures.

The blue smoke curling peacefully up from the chimney and the white gleam of the walls through the shady trees —for this rancho actually boasted a chimney and whitewashed walls—looked exceedingly inviting to my tired

eyes. How pleasant a good breakfast with a long siesta in the shade after it would be, thought I; but, alas! was I not pursued by the awful phantoms of political vengeance? Uncertain whether to call or not, my horse jogged straight on towards the house, for a horse always knows when his rider is in doubt and never fails at such times to give his advice. It was lucky for me that on this occasion I condescended to take it. "I will, at all events, call for a drink of water and see what the people are like," I thought, and in a few minutes I was standing at the gate, apparently an object of great interest to half a dozen children ranging from two to thirteen years old, all staring at me with wide-open eyes. They had dirty faces, the smallest one dirty legs also, for he or she wore nothing but a small shirt. The next in size had a shirt supplemented with a trousers-like garment reaching to the knees; and so on, progressively, up to the biggest boy, who wore the cast-off parental toggery, and so instead of having too little on, was, in a sense, overdressed. I asked this youngster for a can of water to quench my thirst and a stick of fire to light my cigar. He ran into the kitchen, or living-room, and by-and-by came out again without either water or fire. "Papita wishes you to come in to drink maté," said he.

Then I dismounted, and with the careless air of a blameless non-political person, strode into the spacious kitchen, where an immense cauldron of fat was boiling over a big fire on the hearth; while beside it, ladle in hand, sat a perspiring, greasy-looking woman of about thirty. She was engaged in skimming the fat and throw-

ing the scum on the fire, which made it blaze with a furious joy and loudly cry out in a crackling voice for more; and from head to feet she was literally bathed in grease—certainly the most greasy individual I had ever seen. It was not easy under the circumstances to tell the colour of her skin, but she had fine large Juno eyes, and her mouth was unmistakably good-humoured, as she smiled when returning my salutation. Her husband sat on the clay floor against the wall, his bare feet stretched straight out before him, while across his lap lay an immense surcingle, twenty inches broad at least, of a pure white, untanned hide; and on it he was laboriously working a design representing an ostrich hunt, with threads of black skin. He was a short, broad-shouldered man with reddish-grey hair, stiff bristly whiskers and moustache of the same hue, sharp blue eyes and a nose decidedly upturned.

He wore a red cotton handkerchief tied on his head, a blue check shirt, and a shawl wound round his body in place of the *chiripà* usually worn by native peasants. He jerked out his "Buen dia" to me in a short, quick, barking voice, and invited me to sit down.

"Cold water is bad for the constitution at this hour," he said. "We will drink maté."

There was such a rough burr-like sound in his speech that I at once concluded he was a foreigner, or hailed from some Oriental district corresponding to our Durham or Northumberland.

"Thank you," I said, "a maté is always welcome. I am an Oriental in that respect if in nothing else." For I wished everyone I met to know that I was not a native.

"Right, my friend," he exclaimed. "Maté is the best thing in this country. As for the people, they are not worth cursing."

"How can you say such a thing," I returned. "You are a foreigner, I suppose, but your wife is surely an Oriental."

The Juno of the grease-pot smiled and threw a ladleful of tallow on the fire to make it roar; possibly this was meant for applause.

He waved his hand deprecatingly, the bradawl used for his work in it.

"True, friend, she is," he replied. "Women, like horned cattle, are much the same all the world over. They have their value wherever you find them—America, Europe, Asia. We know it. I spoke of men."

"You scarcely do women justice—

La mujer es un angel del cielo,"

I returned, quoting the old Spanish song.

He barked out a short little laugh.

"That does very well to sing to a guitar," he said.

"Talking of guitars," spoke the woman, addressing me for the first time; "while we are waiting for the maté, perhaps you will sing us a ballad. The guitar is lying just behind you."

"Señora, I do not play on it," I answered. "An Englishman goes forth into the world without that desire common to people of other nations of making himself agreeable to those he may encounter on his way; this is why he does not learn to perform on musical instruments."

The little man stared at me; then deliberately disencumbering himself of surcingle, threads, and implements, he got up, advanced to me, and held out his hand.

His grave manner almost made me laugh. Taking his hand in mine, I said—

"What am I to do with this, my friend?"

"Shake it," he replied. "We are countrymen."

We then shook hands very vigorously for some time in silence, while his wife looked on with a smile and stirred the fat.

"Woman," he said, turning to her, "leave your grease till to-morrow. Breakfast must be thought of. Is there any mutton in the house?"

"Half a sheep—only," she replied.

"That will do for one meal," said he. "Here, Teofilo, run and tell Anselmo to catch two pullets—fat ones, mind. To be plucked at once. You may look for half a dozen fresh eggs for your mother to put in the stew. And, Felipe, go find Cosme and tell him to saddle the roan pony to go to the store at once. Now, wife, what is wanted—rice, sugar, vinegar, oil, raisins, pepper, saffron, salt, cloves, cummin seed, wine, brandy——"

"Stop one moment," I cried. "If you think it necessary to get provisions enough for an army to give me breakfast, I must tell you that I draw the line at brandy. I never touch it—in this country."

He shook hands with me again.

"You are right," he said. "Always stick to the native drink, wherever you are, even if it is black draught.

Whisky in Scotland, in the Banda Oriental rum—that's my rule."

The place was now in a great commotion, the children saddling ponies, shouting in pursuit of fugitive chickens, and my energetic host ordering his wife about.

After the boy was despatched for the things and my horse taken care of, we sat for half an hour in the kitchen sipping maté and conversing very agreeably. Then my host took me out into his garden behind the house to be out of his wife's way while she was engaged cooking breakfast, and there he began talking in English.

"Twenty-five years I have been on this continent," said he, telling me his history, "eighteen of them in the Banda Oriental."

"Well, you have not forgotten your language," I said. "I suppose you read?"

"Read! What! I would as soon think of wearing trousers. No, no, my friend, never read. Leave politics alone. When people molest you, shoot 'em—those are my rules. Edinburgh was my home. Had enough reading when I was a boy; heard enough psalm-singing, saw enough scrubbing and scouring to last me my lifetime. My father was a bookseller in the High Street, near the Cowgate—you know! Mother, she was pious—they were all pious. Uncle, a minister, lived with us. That was all worse than purgatory to me. I was educated at the High School—intended for the ministry, ha, ha! My only pleasure was to get a book of travels in some savage country, skulk into my room, throw off my boots, light a pipe, and lie on the floor reading—locked up from every-

one. Sundays just the same. They called me a sinner, said I was going to the devil—fast. It was my nature. They didn't understand—kept on ding-donging in my ears. Always scrubbing, scouring—you might have eaten your dinner off the floor; always singing psalms—praying—scolding. Couldn't bear it; ran away at fifteen, and have never heard a word from home since. What happened? I came here, worked, saved, bought land, cattle; married a wife, lived as I liked to live—am happy. There's my wife—mother of six children—you have seen her yourself, a woman for a man to be proud of. No ding-donging, black looks, scouring from Monday to Saturday—you couldn't eat your dinner off *my* kitchen floor. There are my children, six of 'em, all told, boys and girls, healthy, dirty as they like to be, happy as the day's long; and here am I, John Carrickfergus—Don Juan all the country over, my surname no native can pronounce—respected, feared, loved; a man his neighbour can rely on to do him a good turn; one who never hesitates about putting a bullet in any vulture, wild cat, or assassin that crosses his path. Now you know all."

"An extraordinary history," I said, "but I suppose you teach your children something?"

"Teach 'em nothing," he returned with emphasis. 'All we think about in the old country are books, cleanliness, clothes; what's good for soul, brain, stomach, and we make 'em miserable. Liberty for everyone—that's my rule. Dirty children are healthy, happy children. If a bee stings you in England, you clap on fresh dirt to cure the pain. Here we cure all kinds of pains with dirt.

If my child is ill I dig up a spadeful of fresh mould and rub it well—best remedy out. I'm not religious, but I remember *one* miracle. The Saviour spat on the ground and made mud with the spittle to anoint the eyes of the blind man. Made him see directly. What does that mean? Common remedy of the country, of course. *He* didn't need the clay, but followed the custom, same as in the other miracles. In Scotland dirt's wickedness—how'd they reconcile that with Scripture? I don't say *Nature*, mind, I say *Scripture*, because the Bible's the book they swear by, though they didn't write it."

"I shall think over what you say about children, and the best way to rear them," I returned. "I needn't decide in a hurry, as I haven't any yet."

He barked his short laugh and led me back to the house, where the arrangements for breakfast were now completed. The children took their meal in the kitchen, we had ours in a large cool room adjoining it. There was a small table laid with a spotless white cloth, and real crockery plates and real knives and forks. There were also real glass tumblers, bottles of Spanish wine, and snow-white *pan creollo*. Evidently my hostess had made good use of her time. She came in immediately after we were seated, and I scarcely recognised her; for she was not only clean now, but good-looking as well, with that rich olive colour on her oval face, her black hair well arranged, and her dark eyes full of tender loving light. She was now wearing a white merino dress with a quaint maroon-coloured pattern on it, and a white silk kerchief fastened with a gold brooch at her neck. It was

pleasant to look at her, and noticing my admiring glances, she blushed when she sat down, then laughed. The breakfast was excellent. Roast mutton to begin, then a dish of chickens stewed with rice, nicely flavoured and coloured with red Spanish *pimenton*. A fowl roasted or boiled, as we eat them in England, is wasted, compared with this delicious *guiso de pollo* which one gets in any rancho in the Banda Orientál. After the meats we sat for an hour cracking walnuts, sipping wine, smoking cigarettes, and telling amusing stories; and I doubt whether there were three happier people in all Uruguay that morning than the un-Scotched Scotchman, John Carrickfergus, his unding-donging native wife, and their guest, who had shot his man on the previous evening.

After breakfast I spread my poncho on the dry grass under a tree to sleep the siesta. My slumbers lasted a long time, and on waking I was surprised to find my host and hostess seated on the grass near me, he busy ornamenting his surcingle, she with the maté-cup in her hand and a kettle of hot water beside her. She was drying her eyes, I fancied, when I opened mine.

"Awake at last!" cried Don Juan pleasantly. "Come and drink maté. Wife just been crying, you see."

She made a sign for him to hold his peace.

"Why not speak of it, Candelaria?" he said. "Where is the harm? You see my wife thinks you have been in the wars—a Santa Coloma man running away to save his throat."

"How does she make that out?" I asked in some confusion and very much surprised.

"How! Don't you know women? You said nothing about where you had been—prudence. That was one thing. Looked confused when we talked of the revolution—not a word to say about it. More evidence. Your poncho, lying there, shows two big cuts in it. 'Torn by thorns,' said I. 'Sword cuts,' said she. We were arguing about it when you woke."

"She guessed rightly," I said, "and I am ashamed of myself for not telling you before. But why should your wife cry?"

"Woman like—woman like," he answered, waving his hand. "Always ready to cry over the beaten one—that is the only politics they know."

"Did I not say that woman is an angel from heaven," I returned; then taking her hand, I kissed it. "This is the first time I have kissed a married woman's hand, but the husband of such a wife will know better than to be jealous."

"Jealous—ha, ha!" he laughed. "It would have made me prouder if you had kissed her cheek."

"Juan—a nice thing to say!" exclaimed his wife, slapping his hand tenderly.

Then while we sipped maté I told them the history of my campaign, finding it necessary, when explaining my motives for joining the rebels, to make some slight deviations from the strictest form of truth. He agreed that my best plan was to go on to Rocha to wait there for a passport before proceeding to Montevideo. But I was not allowed to leave them that day; and while we talked

over our maté, Candelaria deftly repaired the tell-tale cuts in my poncho.

I spent the afternoon making friends with the children, who proved to be very intelligent and amusing little beggars, telling them some nonsensical stories I invented, and listening to their bird's-nesting, armadillo-chasing, and other adventures. Then came a late dinner, after which the children said their prayers and retired, then we smoked and sang songs without an accompaniment, and I finished a happy day by sinking to sleep in a soft, clean bed.

I had announced my intention of leaving at daybreak next morning; and when I woke, finding it already light, I dressed hastily, and, going out, found my horse already saddled standing, with three other saddled horses, at the gate. In the kitchen I found Don Juan, his wife, and the two biggest boys having their early maté. My host told me that he had been up an hour, and was only waiting to wish me a prosperous journey before going out to gather up his cattle. He at once wished me good-bye, and with his two boys went off, leaving me to partake of poached eggs and coffee—quite an English breakfast.

I then rose and thanked the good señora for her hospitality.

"One moment," she said, when I held out my hand, and drawing a small silk bag from her bosom, she offered it to me. "My husband has given me permission to present you with this at parting. It is only a small gift, but while you are in this trouble and away from all your friends it perhaps might be of use to you."

I did not wish to take money from her after all the kind treatment I had received, and so allowed the purse to lie on my open hand where she had placed it.

"And if I cannot accept it——" I began.

"Then you will hurt me very much," she replied. "Could you do that after the kind words you spoke yesterday?"

I could not resist, but after putting the purse away, took her hand and kissed it.

"Good-bye, Candelaria," I said, "you have made me love your country and repent every harsh word I have ever spoken against it."

Her hand remained in mine; she stood smiling, and did not seem to think the last word had been spoken yet. Then seeing her there looking so sweet and loving, and remembering the words her husband had spoken the day before, I stooped and kissed her cheek and lips.

"Adieu, my friend, and God be with you," she said.

I think there were tears in her eyes when I left her, but I could not see clearly, for mine also had suddenly grown dim.

And only the day before I had felt amused at the sight of this woman sitting hot and greasy over her work, and had called her Juno of the grease-pot! Now, after an acquaintance of about eighteen hours I had actually kissed her—a wife and the mother of six children, bidding her adieu with trembling voice and moist eyes! I know that I shall never forget those eyes, full of sweet, pure affection and tender sympathy, looking into mine; all my life long shall I think of Candelaria, loving her like

a sister. Could any woman in my own ultra-civilised and excessively proper country inspire me with a feeling like that in so short a time? I fancy not. O civilisation, with your million conventions, soul and body withering prudishnesses, vain education for the little ones, going to church in best black clothes, unnatural craving for cleanliness, feverish striving after comforts that bring no comfort to the heart, are you a mistake altogether? Candelaria and that genial runaway John Carrickfergus make me think so. Ah yes, we are all vainly seeking after happiness in the wrong way. It was with us once and ours, but we despised it, for it was only the old common happiness which Nature gives to all her children, and we went away from it in search of another grander kind of happiness which some dreamer—Bacon or another—assured us we should find. We had only to conquer Nature, find out her secrets, make her our obedient slave, then the earth would be Eden, and every man Adam and every woman Eve. We are still marching bravely on, conquering Nature, but how weary and sad we are getting! The old joy in life and gaiety of heart have vanished, though we do sometimes pause for a few moments in our long forced march to watch the labours of some pale mechanician seeking after perpetual motion and indulge in a little, dry, cackling laugh at his expense.

CHAPTER XXII

A CROWN OF NETTLES

AFTER leaving John and Candelaria's home of liberty and love, nothing further worth recording happened till I had nearly reached the desired haven of the Lomas de Rocha, a place which I was, after all, never destined to see except from a great distance. A day unusually brilliant even for this bright climate was drawing to a close, it being within about two hours of sunset, when I turned out of my way to ascend a hill with a very long ridge-like summit, falling away at one end, appearing like the last sierra of a range just where it dies down into the level plain; only in this instance the range itself did not exist. The solitary hill was covered with short tussocks of yellow, wiry grass, with occasional bushes, while near the summit large slabs of sandstone appeared just above the surface, looking like gravestones in some old village churchyard, with all their inscriptions obliterated by time and weather. From this elevation, which was about a hundred feet above the plain, I wished to survey the country before me, for I was tired and hungry, so was my horse, and I was anxious to find a resting-place before night. Before me the country stretched away in vast undulations towards the ocean, which was not, however, in sight. Not the faintest stain

of vapour appeared on the immense crystalline dome of heaven, while the stillness and transparency of the atmosphere seemed almost preternatural. A blue gleam of water, south-east of where I stood and many leagues distant, I took to be the lake of Rocha; on the western horizon were faint blue cloud-like masses with pearly peaks. They were not clouds, however, but the sierras of the range weirdly named *Cuchilla de las Animas*—Ghost-haunted mountains. At length, like a person who puts his binocular into his pocket and begins to look about him, I recalled my vision from its wanderings over illimitable space to examine the objects close at hand. On the slope of the hill, sixty yards from my standpoint, were some deep green, dwarf bushes, each bush looking in that still brilliant sunshine as if it had been hewn out of a block of malachite; and on the pale purple solanaceous flowers covering them some humble-bees were feeding. It was the humming of the bees coming distinctly to my ears that first attracted my attention to the bushes; for so still was the atmosphere that at that distance apart—sixty yards—two persons might have conversed easily without raising their voices. Much further down, about two hundred yards from the bushes, a harrier hawk stood on the ground, tearing at something it had captured, feeding in that savage, suspicious manner usual with hawks, with long pauses between the bites. Over the harrier hovered a brown milvago hawk, a vulture-like bird in its habits, that lives by picking up unconsidered trifles. Envious at the other's good fortune, or fearing, perhaps, that not even the crumbs or feathers of the

feast were going to be left, it was persecuting the harrier by darting down at intervals with an angry cry and aiming a blow with its wing. The harrier methodically ducked its head each time its tormentor rushed down at it, after which it would tear its prey again in its uncomfortable manner. Further away, in the depression running along at the foot of the hill, meandered a small stream so filled with aquatic grasses and plants that the water was quite concealed, its course appearing like a vivid green snake, miles long, lying there basking in the sunshine. At the point of the stream nearest to me an old man was seated on the ground, apparently washing himself, for he was stooping over a little pool of water, while behind him stood his horse with patient, drooping head, occasionally switching off the flies with its tail. A mile further on stood a dwelling, which looked to me like an old estancia-house, surrounded by large shade trees growing singly or in irregular clumps. It was the only house near, but after gazing at it for some time I concluded that it was uninhabited. For even at that distance I could see plainly that there were no human beings moving about it, no horse or other domestic animal near, and there were certainly no hedges or enclosures of any description.

Slowly I went down the hill, and to the old man sitting beside the stream. I found him engaged in the seemingly difficult operation of disentangling a luxuriant crop of very long hair, which had somehow—possibly from long neglect—got itself into great confusion. He had dipped his head into the water, and with an old comb, boasting

about seven or eight teeth, was laboriously and with infinite patience drawing out the long hairs, a very few at a time. After saluting him, I lit a cigarette, and leaning on the neck of my horse, watched his efforts for some time with profound interest. He toiled away in silence for five or six minutes, then dipped his head in the water again, and while carefully wringing the wet out he remarked that my horse looked tired.

"Yes," I replied; "so is his rider. Can you tell me who lives in that estancia?"

"My master," he returned laconically.

"Is he a good-hearted man—one who will give shelter to a stranger?" I asked.

He took a very long time to answer me, then said—

"He has nothing to say about such matters."

"An invalid?" I remarked.

Another long pause; then he shook his head and tapped his forehead significantly; after which he resumed his mermaid task.

"Demented?" said I.

He elevated an eyebrow and shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing.

After a long silence, for I was anxious not to irritate him with too much questioning, I ventured to remark—

"Well, they will not set the dogs on me, will they?"

He grinned and said that it was an establishment without dogs.

I paid him for his information with a cigarette, which he took very readily, and seemed to think smoking a pleasant relief after his disentangling labours.

"An estancia without dogs, and where the master has nothing to say—that sounds strange," I remarked tentatively, but he puffed on in silence.

"What is the name of the house?" I said, after remounting my horse.

"It is a house without a name," he replied; and after this rather unsatisfactory interview I left him and slowly went on to the estancia.

On approaching the house I saw that there had formerly been a large plantation behind it, of which only a few dead stumps now remained, the ditches that had enclosed them being now nearly obliterated. The place was ruinous and overgrown with weeds. Dismounting, I led my horse along a narrow path through a perfect wilderness of wild sunflowers, horehound, red-weed, and thorn-apple, up to some poplar trees where there had once been a gate, of which only two or three broken posts remained standing in the ground. From the old gate the path ran on, still through weeds, to the door of the house, which was partly of stone and partly of red brick, with a very steep, sloping, tiled roof. Beside the ruined gate, leaning against a post, with the hot afternoon sun shining on her uncovered head, stood a woman in a rusty-black dress. She was about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, and had an unutterably weary, desponding expression on her face, which was colourless as marble, except for the purple stains under her large dark eyes. She did not move when I approached her, but raised her sorrowful eyes to my face, apparently feeling little interest in my arrival.

I took off my hat to salute her, and said—

"Señora, my horse is tired, and I am seeking for a resting-place; can I have shelter under your roof?"

"Yes, caballero; why not?" she returned in a voice even more significant of sorrow than her countenance.

I thanked her, and waited for her to lead the way; but she still remained standing before me with eyes cast down, and a hesitating, troubled look on her face.

"Señora," I began, "if a stranger's presence in the house would be inconvenient——"

"No, no, señor, it is not that," she interrupted quickly. Then, sinking her voice almost to a whisper, she said—"Tell me, señor, have you come from the department of Florida? Have you—have you been at San Paulo?"

I hesitated a little, then answered that I had.

"On which side?" she asked quickly, with a strange eagerness in her voice.

"Ah, señora," I returned, "why do you ask me, only a poor traveller who comes for a night's shelter, such a question——"

"Why? Perhaps for your good, señor. Remember, women are not like men—implacable. A shelter you shall have, señor; but it is best that I should know."

"You are right," I returned, "forgive me for not answering you at once. I was with Santa Coloma—the rebel."

She held out her hand to me, but, before I could take it, withdrew it and, covering her face, began to cry. Presently recovering herself and turning towards the house, she asked me to follow.

Her gestures and tears had told me eloquently enough that she too belonged to the unhappy Blanco party.

"Have you then lost some relation in this fight, señora?" I asked.

"No, señor," she replied; "but if our party had triumphed perhaps deliverance would have come to me. Ah no; I lost my relations long ago—all except my father. You shall know presently, when you see him, why our cruel enemies have refrained from shedding *his* blood."

By that time we had reached the house. There had once been a verandah to it, but this had long fallen away, leaving the walls, doors, and windows exposed to sun and rain. Lichen covered the stone walls, while in the crevices and over the tiled roof weeds and grass had flourished; but this vegetation had died with the summer heats and was now parched and yellow. She led me into a spacious room, so dimly lighted from the low door and one small window that it seemed quite dark to me coming from the bright sunlight. I stood for a few moments trying to accustom my eyes to the gloom, while she, advancing to the middle of the apartment, bent down and spoke to an aged man seated in a leather-bound easy-chair.

"Papa," she said, "I have brought in a young man—a stranger who has asked for shelter under our roof. Welcome him, papa."

Then she straightened herself, and passing behind the chair stood leaning on it, facing me.

"I wish you good day, señor," I said, advancing with a little hesitation.

There before me sat a tall, bent old man, wasted almost to a skeleton, with a grey, desolate face and long hair and

beard of a silver whiteness. He was wrapped in a light-coloured poncho, and wore a black skull-cap on his head. When I spoke he leant back in his seat and began scanning my face with strangely fierce eager eyes, all the time twisting his long, thin fingers together in a nervous, excited manner.

"What, Calixto," he exclaimed at length, "is this the way you come into my presence? Ha, you thought I would not recognise you! Down—down, boy, on your knees!"

I glanced at his daughter standing behind him; she was watching my face anxiously, and made a slight inclination with her head.

Taking this as an intimation to obey the old man's commands, I went down on my knees, and touched my lips to the hand he extended.

"May God give you grace, my son," he said with tremulous voice. Then he continued: "What, did you expect to find your old father blind then? I would know you amongst a thousand, Calixto. Ah, my son, my son, why have you kept away so long? Stand, my son, and let me embrace you."

He rose up tottering from his chair and threw his arm about me; then, after gazing into my face for some moments, deliberately kissed me on both cheeks.

"Ha, Calixto," he continued, putting his trembling hands upon my shoulders and gazing into my face out of his wild, sunken eyes, "do I need ask where you have been? Where should a Peralta be but in the smoke of the battle, in the midst of carnage, fighting for the

Banda Oriental? I did not complain of your absence, Calixto — Demetria will tell you that I was patient through all these years, for I knew you would come back to me at last wearing the laurel wreath of victory. And I, Calixto, what have I worn, sitting here? A crown of nettles! Yes, for a hundred years I have worn it—you are my witness, Demetria, my daughter, that I have worn this crown of stinging-nettles for a hundred years."

He sank back, apparently exhausted, in his chair, and I uttered a sigh of relief, thinking the interview was now over. But I was mistaken. His daughter placed a chair for me at his side. "Sit here, señor, and talk to my father, while I have your horse taken care of," she whispered, and then quickly glided from the room. This was rather hard on me, I thought; but while whispering those few words she touched my hand lightly and turned her wistful eyes with a grateful look on mine, and I was glad for her sake that I had not blundered.

Presently the old man roused himself again and began talking eagerly, asking me a hundred wild questions, to which I was compelled to reply, still trying to keep up the character of the long-lost son just returned victorious from the wars.

"Tell me where you have fought and overcome the enemy," he exclaimed, raising his voice almost to a scream. "Where have they flown from you like chaff before the wind?—where have you trodden them down under your horses' hoofs?—name—name the places and the battles to me, Calixto?"

I felt strongly inclined just then to jump up and rush

out of the room, so trying was this mad conversation to my nerves; but I thought of his daughter Demetria's white, pathetic face, and restrained the impulse. Then in sheer desperation I began to talk madly as himself. I thought I would make him sick of warlike subjects. Everywhere, I cried, we had defeated, slaughtered, scattered to the four winds of heaven, the infamous Colorados. From the sea to the Brazilian frontier we have been victorious. With sword, lance, and bayonet we have stormed and taken every town from Tacuarembó to Montevideo. Every river from the Yaguaron to the Uruguay had run red with Colorado blood. In forests and sierras we had hunted them, flying like wild beasts from us; we had captured them in thousands, only to cut their throats, crucify them, blow them from guns, and tear them limb by limb to pieces with wild horses.

I was only pouring oil on the blazing fire of his insanity.

"Aha!" he shouted, his eyes sparkling while he wildly clutched my arm with his skinny, claw-like hands, "did I not know—have I not said it? Did I not fight for a hundred years, wading through blood every day, and then at last send you forth to finish the battle? And every day our enemies came and shouted in my ears, 'Victory—victory!' They told me you were dead, Calixto—that their weapons had pierced you, that they had given your flesh to be devoured of wild dogs. And I shouted with laughter to hear them. I laughed in their faces and clapped my hands and cried out, 'Prepare your throats for the sword, traitors, slaves, assassins. for a Peralta—

even Calixto, devoured of wild dogs—is coming to execute vengeance! What, will God not leave one strong arm to strike at the tyrant's breast—one Peralta in all this land! Fly, miscreants! Die, wretches! He has risen from the grave—he has come back from hell, armed with hell-fire to burn your towns to ashes—to extirpate you utterly from the earth!'"

His thin, tremulous voice had risen towards the close of this mad speech to a reedy shriek that rang through the quiet, darkening house like the long, shrill cry of some water-fowl heard at night in the desolate marshes.

Then he loosened his hold on my arm and dropped back moaning and shivering into his seat. His eyes closed, his whole frame trembled, and he looked like a person just recovering from an epileptic fit; then he seemed to sink to sleep. It was now getting quite dark, for the sun had been down some time, and it was with the greatest relief that I saw Doña Demetria gliding like a ghost into the room. She touched me on the arm and whispered, "Come, señor, he is asleep now."

I followed her out into the fresh air, which had never seemed so fresh before; then, turning to me, she hurriedly whispered, "Remember, señor, that what you have told me is a secret. Say not one word of it to any other person here."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RED FLAG OF VICTORY

SHE then led me to the kitchen at the end of the house. It was one of those roomy, old-fashioned kitchens still to be found in a few estancia-houses built in colonial times, in which the fireplace, raised a foot or two above the floor, extends the whole width of the room. It was large and dimly lighted, the walls and rafters black with a century's smoke and abundantly festooned with sooty cobwebs; but a large, cheerful fire blazed on the hearth, while before it stood a tall, gaunt woman engaged in cooking the supper and serving maté. This was Ramona, an old servant on the estancia. There also sat my friend of the tangled tresses, which he had evidently succeeded in combing well out, for they now hung down quite smooth on his back and as long as a woman's hair. Another person was also seated near the fire, whose age might have been anything from twenty-five to forty-five, for he had, I think, a mixture of Indian blood in his veins, and one of those smooth, dry, dark faces that change but little with age. He was an undersized, wiry-looking man with a small, intensely black moustache, but no whiskers or beard. He seemed to be a person of some consequence in the house, and when my conductress intro-

duced him to me as "Don Hilario," he rose to his feet and received me with a profound bow. In spite of his excessive politeness I conceived a feeling of distrust towards him from the moment I saw him; and this was because his small, watchful eyes were perpetually glancing at my face in a furtive manner, only to glance swiftly away again whenever I looked at him; for he seemed quite incapable of meeting the gaze of another. We drank maté and talked a little, but were not a lively party. Doña Demetria, though she sat with us, scarcely contributed a word to the conversation; while the long-haired man—Santos by name, and the only peon on the establishment—smoked his cigarette and sipped his maté in absolute silence.

Bony old Ramona at length dished up the supper and carried it out of the kitchen; we followed to the large living-room where I had been before and gathered round a small table; for these people, though apparently poverty-stricken, ate their meals after the manner of civilised beings. At the head of the table sat the fierce, old, white-haired man staring at us out of his sunken eyes as we entered. Half rising from his seat he motioned to me to take a chair near him, then addressing Don Hilario, who sat opposite, he said, "This is my son Calixto just returned from the wars, where, as you know, he has greatly distinguished himself."

Don Hilario rose and bowed gravely. Demetria took the other end of the table, while Santos and Ramona occupied the two remaining seats.

I was greatly relieved to find that the old man's mood

had changed; there were no more wild outbursts like the one I had witnessed earlier in the evening; only occasionally he would fix his strange, burning eyes on me in a way that made me exceedingly uncomfortable. We began the meal with broth, which we finished in silence; and while we ate, Don Hilario's swift glances incessantly flew from face to face; Demetria, pale and evidently ill at ease, keeping her eyes cast down all the time.

"Is there no wine this evening, Ramona?" asked the old man in querulous tones when the old woman rose to remove the broth basins.

"The *master* has not ordered me to put any on the table," she replied with asperity and strongly emphasising the obnoxious word.

"What does this mean, Don Hilario?" said the old man, turning to his neighbour. "My son has just returned after a long absence; are we to have no wine for an occasion like this?"

Don Hilario with a faint smile on his lips drew a key from his pocket and passed it silently to Ramona. She rose, muttering, from the table and proceeded to unlock a cupboard, from which she took a bottle of wine. Then going round the table she poured out half a tumblerful for each person, excepting herself and Santos, who, to judge from his stolid countenance, did not expect any.

"No, no," said old Peralta, "give Santos wine, and pour yourself out a glass also, Ramona. You have both been good, faithful friends to me, and have nursed Calixto in his infancy. It is right that you should drink his health and rejoice with us at his return."

She obeyed with alacrity, and old Santos' wooden face almost relaxed into a grin when he received his share of the purple fluid (I can scarcely call it juice) which maketh glad the heart of man.

Presently old Peralta raised his glass and fixed his fierce, insane eyes on me. "Calixto, my son, we will drink your health," he said, "and may the curse of the Almighty fall on our enemies; may their bodies lie where they fall, till the hawks have consumed their flesh, and their bones have been trodden into dust by the cattle; and may their souls be tormented with everlasting fire."

Silently they all raised their glasses to their lips, but when they set them down again, the points of Don Hilario's black moustache were raised as if by a smile, while Santos smacked his lips in token of enjoyment.

After this ghastly toast nothing more was spoken by anyone at the table. In oppressive silence we consumed the roast and boiled meat set before us; for I dared not hazard even the most commonplace remark for fear of rousing my volcanic host into a mad eruption. When we had finished eating, Demetria rose and brought her father a cigarette. It was the signal that supper was over; and immediately afterwards she left the room, followed by the two servants. Don Hilario politely offered me a cigarette and lit one for himself. For some minutes we smoked in silence, until the old man gradually dropped to sleep in his chair, after which we rose and went back to the kitchen. Even that sombre retreat now seemed cheerful after the silence and gloom of the dining-room. Presently

Don Hilario got up, and with many apologies for leaving me, explaining that he had been invited to assist at a dance at a neighbouring estancia, took himself off. Soon afterwards, though it was only about nine o'clock, I was shown to a room where a bed had been prepared for me. It was a large, musty-smelling apartment, almost empty, there being only my bed and a few tall, upright chairs bound with leather and black with age. The floor was tiled, and the ceiling was covered with a dusty canopy of cobwebs, on which flourished a numerous colony of long-legged house-spiders. I had no disposition to sleep at that early hour, and even envied Don Hilario away enjoying himself with the Rocha beauties. My door, looking out to the front, was standing wide open; the full moon had just risen and was filling the night with its mystic splendour. Putting out my candle, for the house was now all dark and silent, I softly went out for a stroll. Under a clump of trees not far off I found an old rustic bench, and sat down on it; for the place was all such a tangled wilderness of great weeds that walking was scarcely practicable and very unpleasant.

The old half-ruined house in the midst of the dusky desolation began to assume in the moonlight a singularly weird and ghost-like appearance. Near me on one side was an irregular row of poplar trees, and the long, dark lines cast from them by the moon fell across a wide, open space where the rank-growing thorn-apples predominated. In the spaces between the broad bands made by the poplar-tree shadows, the foliage appeared of a dim, hoary blue, starred over with the white blossoms of this night

flowering weed. About these flowers several big, grey moths were hovering, suddenly appearing out of the black shadows, and when looked for, noiselessly vanishing again in their mysterious ghost-like manner. Not a sound disturbed the silence except the faint melancholy trill of one small night-singing cicada from somewhere near—a faint, aerial voice that seemed to be wandering lost in infinite space, rising and floating away in its loneliness, while earth listened, hushed into preternatural stillness. Presently a large owl came noiselessly flying by, and perching on the topmost boughs of a neighbouring tree, began hooting a succession of monotonous notes, sounding like the baying of a bloodhound at a vast distance. Another owl by-and-by responded from some far-off quarter, and the dreary duet was kept up for half an hour. Whenever one bird ceased his solemn *boo-boo-boo-boo-boo*, I found myself with stilled breath straining my sense to catch the answering notes, fearing to stir lest I should lose them. A phosphorescent gleam swept by close to my face, making me start at its sudden appearance, then passed away, trailing a line of faint light over the dusky weeds. The passing firefly served to remind me that I was not smoking, and the thought then occurred to me that a cigar might possibly have the effect of relieving me from the strange, indefinable feeling of depression that had come over me. I put my hand into my pocket and drew out a cigar, and bit the end off; but when about to strike a vesta on my matchbox, I shuddered and dropped my hand.

The very thought of striking a loud exploding match

was unendurable to me, so strangely nervous did I feel. Or, possibly it was a superstitious mood I had fallen into. It seemed to me at that moment that I had somehow drifted into a region of mystery, peopled only by unearthly, fantastic beings. The people I had supped with did not seem like creatures of flesh and blood. The small, dark countenance of Don Hilario with its shifty glances and Mephistophelian smile; Demetria's pale, sorrowful face, and the sunken, insane eyes of her old, white-haired father, were all about me in the moonlight and amongst the tangled greenery. I dared not move; I scarcely breathed; the very weeds with their pale, dusky leaves were like things that had a ghostly life. And while I was in this morbid condition of mind, with that irrational fear momentarily increasing on me, I saw at a distance of about thirty yards a dark object, which seemed to move, fluttering in an uncertain way towards me. I gazed intently on it, but it was motionless now, and appeared like a black, formless shadow within the shade of the trees. Presently it came again towards me, and passing into the clear moonlight, revealed a human figure. It flitted across the bright space and was lost in the shade of other trees; but it still approached, a waving, fluttering figure, advancing and receding, but always coming nearer. My blood turned cold in my veins; I could feel my hair standing up on my head, until, unable to endure the terrible suspense longer, I jumped up from my seat. A loud exclamation of terror came from the figure, and then I saw that it was Demetria. I stammered out an apology for frightening her by jumping

up, and finding that I had recognised her, she advanced to me.

"Ah, you are not asleep, señor," said she quietly. "I saw you from my window come out here more than an hour ago. Finding you did not return I began to grow anxious, and thought that, tired with your journey, you had fallen asleep out here. I came to wake you and to warn you that it is very dangerous to lie sleeping with your face exposed to the full moon."

I explained that I had felt restless and disinclined to sleep, regretted that I had caused her anxiety, and thanked her for her thoughtful kindness.

Instead of leaving me then she sat quietly down on the bench. "Señor," she said, "if it is your intention to continue your journey to-morrow, let me advise you not to do so. You can safely remain here for a few days, for in this sad house we have no visitors."

I told her that acting on Santa Coloma's advice, given to me before the fight, I was going on to the Lomas de Rocha to see a person named Florentino Blanco in that place, who would probably be able to procure me a passport from Montevideo.

"How fortunate it is that you have told me this!" she replied. "Every stranger now entering the Lomas is rigorously examined, and you could not possibly escape arrest if you went there. Remain with us, señor; it is a poor house, but we are well disposed towards you. To-morrow Santos shall go with a letter from you to Don Florentino, who is always ready to serve us, and he will do what you wish without seeing you."

I thanked her warmly and accepted the offer of a refuge in her house. Somewhat to my surprise she still remained seated on the bench. Presently she said—

"It is natural, señor, that you should not be glad to remain in a house so *triste*. But there will be no repetition of all you were obliged to endure on first entering it. Whenever my father sees a young man, a stranger to him, he receives him as he received you to-day, mistaking him for his son. After the first day, however, he loses all interest in the new face, becoming indifferent, and forgetting all he has said or imagined."

This information relieved me, and I remarked that I supposed the loss of his son had been the cause of his malady.

"You are right; let me tell you how it happened," she replied. "For this estancia must seem to you a place unlike all others in the world, and it is only natural that a stranger should wish to know the reason of its sad condition. I know that I can speak without fear of these things to one who is a friend to Santa Coloma."

"And to you, I hope, señorita," I said.

"Thank you, señor. All my life has been spent here. When I was a child my brother went into the army, then my mother died, and I was left here alone, for the siege of Montevideo had begun and I could not go there. At length my father received a terrible wound in action and was brought here to die, as we thought. For months he lay on his bed, his life trembling in the balance. Our enemies triumphed at last; the siege was over, the Blanco leaders dead or driven into exile. My father had been

one of the bravest officers in the Blanco forces, and could not hope to escape the general persecution. They only waited for his recovery to arrest him and convey him to the capital, where, doubtless, he would have been shot. While he lay in this precarious condition every wrong and indignity was heaped upon us. Our horses were seized by the commander of the department, our cattle slaughtered or driven off and sold, while our house was searched for arms and visited every week by an officer who came to report on my father's health. One reason for this animosity was that Calixto, my brother, had escaped and maintained a guerilla war against the government on the Brazilian frontier. At length my father recovered so far from his wounds as to be able to creep out for an hour every day leaning on someone for support; then two armed men were sent to keep guard here to prevent his escape. We were thus living in continual dread when one day an officer came and produced a written order from the Commandante. He did not read it to me, but said it was an order for every person in the Rocha department to display a red flag on his house in token of rejoicing at a victory won by the government troops. I told him that we did not wish to disobey the Commandante's orders, but had no red flag in the house to hang out. He answered that he had brought one for that purpose with him. He unrolled it and fastened it to a pole; then climbing to the roof of the house he raised and made it fast there. Not satisfied with these insults, he ordered me to wake my father, who was sleeping, so that he also might see the flag over his

house. My father came out leaning on my shoulder, and when he had cast up his eyes and seen the red flag he turned and cursed the officer. 'Go back,' he cried, 'to the dog, your master, and tell him that Colonel Peralta is still a Blanco in spite of your dishonourable flag. Tell that insolent slave of Brazil that when I was disabled I passed my sword on to my son Calixto, who knows how to use it, fighting for his country's independence.' The officer, who had mounted his horse by this time, laughed, and tossing the order from the commandancia at our feet, bowed derisively and galloped away. My father picked up the paper and read these words: 'Let there be displayed on every house in this department a red flag, in token of joy at the happy tidings of a victory won by the government troops, in which that recreant son of the Republic, the infamous assassin and traitor, Calixto Peralta, was slain!' Alas, señor, loving his son above all things, hoping so much from him, and enfeebled by long suffering, my poor father could not resist this last blow. From that cruel moment he was deprived of reason; and to that calamity we owe it that he was not put to death and that our enemies ceased to persecute us."

Demetria shed some tears when telling me this tragical story. Poor woman, she had said little or nothing about herself, yet how great and enduring must have been her grief. I was deeply moved, and taking her hand told her how deeply her sad story had pained me. Then she rose and bade me good night with a sad smile—sad, but the first smile that had visited her grief-clouded countenance since I had seen her. I could well imagine that even the

sympathy of a stranger must have seemed sweet to her in that dreary isolation.

After she left me I lit my cigar. The night had lost its ghostly character and my fantastic superstitions had vanished. I was back once more in the world of men and women, and could only think of the inhumanity of man to man, and of the infinite pain silently endured by many hearts in that Purple Land. The only mystery still unsolved in that ruinous estancia was Don Hilario, who locked up the wine and was called *master* with bitter irony by Ramona, and who had thought it necessary to apologise to me for depriving me of his precious company that evening.

CHAPTER XXIV

MYSTERY OF THE GREEN BUTTERFLY

I SPENT several days with the Peraltas at their desolate, *kineless* cattle-farm, which was known in the country round simply as *Estancia* or *Campos de Peralta.* Such wearisome days they proved to me, and so anxious was I getting about Paquita away in Montevideo, that I was more than once on the point of giving up waiting for the passport, which Don Florentino had promised to get for me, and boldly venture forth without even that fig-leaf into the open. Demetria's prudent counsels, however, prevailed, so that my departure was put off from day to day. The only pleasure I experienced in the house arose from the belief I entertained that my visit had made an agreeable break in the sad, monotonous life of my gentle hostess. Her tragical story had stirred my heart to a very deep pity, and as I grew every day to know her better I began to appreciate and esteem her for her own pure, gentle, self-sacrificing character. Notwithstanding the dreary seclusion in which she had lived, seeing no society, and with only those old servants, so primitive in their ways, for company, there was not the slightest trace of rusticity in her manner. That, however, is not saying much for Demetria, since in most ladies—most women I

might almost say—of Spanish origin there is a natural grace and dignity of manner one only expects to find in women socially well placed in our own country. When we were all together at meals, or in the kitchen sipping maté, she was invariably silent, always with that shadow of some concealed anxiety on her face; but when alone with me, or when only old Santos and Ramona were present, the cloud would be gone, her eyes would lighten up and the rare smile come more frequently to her lips. Then, at times, she would become almost animated in conversation, listening with lively interest to all I told her about the great world of which she was so ignorant, and laughing, too, at her own ignorance of things known to every town-bred child. When these pleasant conversations took place in the kitchen the two old servants would sit gazing at the face of their mistress apparently absorbed in admiration. They evidently regarded her as the most perfect being that had ever been created; and though there was a ludicrous side to their simple idolatry, I ceased to wonder at it when I began to know her better. They reminded me of two faithful dogs always watching a beloved master's face, and showing in their eyes, glad or pathetic, how they sympathise with all his moods. As for old Colonel Peralta, he did nothing to make me uneasy; after the first day he never talked to me, scarcely even noticing my presence except to salute me in a ceremonious manner when we met at table. He would spend his day between his easy-chair in the house and the rustic bench under the trees, where he would sit for hours at a time leaning forward on his stick, his preternaturally

brilliant eyes watching everything seemingly with a keen, intelligent interest. But he would not speak. He was waiting for his son, thinking his fierce thoughts to himself. Like a bird blown far out over a tumultuous sea and wandering lost, his spirit was ranging over that wild and troubled past—that half a century of fierce passions and bloody warfare in which he had acted a conspicuous part. And perhaps it was sometimes even more in the future than the past—that glorious future when Calixto, lying far off in some mountain pass, or on some swampy plain with the trailing creepers covering his bones, should come back victorious from the wars.

My conversations with Demetria were not frequent, and before long they ceased altogether; for Don Hilario, who was not in harmony with us, was always there, polite-subdued, watchful, but not a man that one could take into his heart. The more I saw of him the less I liked him; and though I am not prejudiced about snakes, as the reader already knows, believing as I do that ancient tradition has made us very unjust towards these interesting children of our universal mother, I can think of no epithet except *snaky* to describe this man. Wherever I happened to be about the place he had a way of coming upon me, stealing through the weeds on his belly as it were, then suddenly appearing unawares before me; while something in his manner suggested a subtle, cold-blooded, venomous nature. Those swift glances of his, which perpetually came and went with such bewildering rapidity, reminded me not of the immovable, stony gaze of the serpent's lidless eyes, but of the flickering little forked

tongue, that flickers, flickers, vanishes and flickers again, and is never for one moment at rest. Who was this man, and what did he there? Why was he, though manifestly not loved by anyone, absolute master of the estancia? He never asked me a question about myself, for it was not in his nature to ask questions, but he had evidently formed some disagreeable suspicions about me that made him look on me as a possible enemy. After I had been a few days in the house he ceased going out, and wherever I went he was always ready to accompany me, or when I met Demetria and began conversing with her, there he would be to take part in our conversation.

At length the piece of paper so long waited for came from the Lomas de Rocha, and with that sacred document, testifying that I was a subject of her Britannic Majesty, Queen Victoria, all fears and hesitation were dismissed from my mind and I prepared to depart for Montevideo.

The instant Don Hilario heard that I was about to leave the estancia his manner toward me changed; he became, in a moment, excessively friendly, pressing me to prolong my visit, also to accept a horse from him as a gift, and saying many kind things about the agreeable moments he had spent in my company. He completely reversed the old saying about welcome the coming, speed the parting guest; but I knew very well that he was anxious enough to see the last of me.

After supper on the eve of my departure he saddled his horse and rode off to attend a dance or gathering of some kind at a neighbouring estancia, for now that he had

recovered from his suspicions he was very eager to resume the social pleasures my presence had interfered with.

I went out to smoke a cigar amongst the trees, it being a very lovely autumnal evening, with the light of an unclouded new moon to temper the darkness. I was walking up and down in a narrow path amongst the weeds, thinking of my approaching meeting with Paquita, when old Santos came out to me and mysteriously informed me that Doña Demetria wished to see me. He led me through the large room where we always had our meals, then through a narrow dimly lighted passage into another room I had not entered before. Though the rest of the house was now in darkness, the old colonel having already retired to bed, it was very light here, there being about half a dozen candles placed about the room. In the centre of the floor, with her old face beaming with delighted admiration, stood Ramona gazing on another person seated on the sofa. And on this individual I also gazed silently for some time; for though I recognised Demetria in her, she was so changed that astonishment prevented me from speaking. The rusty grub had come forth as a splendid green and gold butterfly. She had on a grass-green silk dress, made in a fashion I had never seen before; extremely high in the waist, puffed out on the shoulders, and with enormous bell-shaped sleeves reaching to the elbows, the whole garment being plentifully trimmed with very fine cream-coloured lace. Her long, thick hair, which had hitherto always been worn in heavy plaits on her back, was now piled up in great coils on her head and surmounted by a tortoise-shell comb a

foot high at least, and about fifteen inches broad at the top, looking like an immense crest on her head. In her ears were curious gold filigree pendants reaching to her bare shoulders; she also wore a necklet of half-doubloons linked together in a chain, and heavy gold bracelets on her arms. It was extremely quaint. Possibly this finery had belonged to her grandmother a hundred years ago; and I daresay that bright green was not the proper tint for Demetria's pallid complexion; still I must confess, at the risk of being set down as a barbarian in matters of taste, that it gave me a shock of pleasure to see her. She saw that I was very much surprised, and a blush of confusion overspread her face; then recovering her usual quiet, self-possessed manner she invited me to sit on the sofa by her. I took her hand and complimented her on her appearance. She laughed a little shy laugh, then said that as I was going to leave her next day she did not wish me to remember her only as a woman in rusty black. I replied that I would always remember her not for the colour and fashion of her garments, but for her great unmerited misfortunes, her virtuous heart, and for the kindness she had shown to me. My words evidently pleased her, and while we sat together conversing pleasantly, before us were Ramona and Santos, one standing, the other seated, both feasting their eyes on their mistress in her brilliant attire. Their delight was quite open and childlike, and gave an additional zest to the pleasure I felt. Demetria seemed pleased to think she looked well, and was more light-hearted than I had seen her before. That antique finery, which would have been

laughable on another woman, somehow or other seemed appropriate to her; possibly because the strange simplicity and ignorance of the world displayed in her conversation and that gentle dignity of manner natural to her would have prevented her from appearing ridiculous in any costume.

At length, after we had partaken of maté served by Ramona, the old servants retired from the room, not without many longing, lingering glances at their metamorphosed mistress. Then somehow or other our conversation began to languish, Demetria becoming constrained in manner, while that anxious shadow I had grown so familiar with came again like a cloud over her face. Thinking that it was time to leave her, I rose to go, and thanked her for the pleasant evening I had spent, and expressed a wish that her future would be brighter than her past had been.

"Thank you, Richard," she returned, her eyes cast down, and allowing her hand to rest in mine. "But must you leave me so soon?—there is so much I wish to say to you."

"I will gladly remain and hear it," I said, sitting down again by her side.

"My past has been very sad, as you say, Richard, but you do not know all," and here she put her handkerchief to her eyes. There were, I noticed, several beautiful rings on her fingers, and the handkerchief she held to her eyes was a dainty little embroidered thing with a lace border; for everything in her make-up was complete and in keeping that evening. Even the quaint little shoes

she wore were embroidered with silver thread and had large rosettes on them. After removing the handkerchief from her face, she continued silent and with eyes cast down, looking very pale and troubled.

"Demetria," I said, "tell me how I can serve you? I cannot guess the nature of the trouble you speak of, but if it is one I can help you out of, speak to me without reserve."

"Perhaps you can help me, Richard. It was of this matter I wished to speak this evening. But now—how can I speak of it?"

"Not to one who is your friend, Demetria? I wish you could think that the spirit of your lost brother Calixto was here in me, for I am as ready to help you as he would have been; and I know, Demetria, that you were very dear to him."

Her face flushed, and for a moment her eyes met mine; then, casting them down again, she replied sadly, "It is impossible! I can say no more to you now. My heart oppresses me so that my lips refuse to speak. To-morrow, perhaps."

"To-morrow morning I leave you, and there will be no opportunity of speaking," I said. "Don Hilario will be here watching you, and though he is so much in the house, I cannot believe that you trust him."

She started at the name of Don Hilario, and cried a little in silence; then suddenly she rose and gave me her hand to bid good night. "You shall know everything to-morrow, Richard," she said. "Then you will know how much I trust you and how little I trust him. I

cannot speak myself, but I can trust Santos, who knows everything, and he shall tell you all."

There was a sad, wistful look in her eyes when we parted that haunted me for hours afterwards. Coming into the kitchen I disturbed Ramona and Santos deep in a whispered consultation. They started up, looking somewhat confused; then, when I had lit a cigar and turned to go out, they got up and went back to their mistress.

While I smoked I pondered over the strange evening I had passed, wondering very much what Demetria's secret trouble could be. "The mystery of the green butterfly," I called it; but it was really all too sad even for a mental joke, though a little timely laughter is often the best weapon to meet trouble with, sometimes having an effect like that of a gay sunshade suddenly opened in the face of an angry bull. Unable to solve the riddle, I retired to my room to sleep my last sleep under Peralta's dreary roof.

CHAPTER XXV

DELIVER ME FROM MINE ENEMY!

ABOUT eight o'clock next morning I bade the Peraltas good-bye, and set out on my long-delayed journey, still mounted on that dishonestly acquired steed that had served me so well, for I had declined the good Hilario's offer of a horse. Though all my toils, wanderings, and many services to the cause of liberty (or whatever people fight for in the Banda) had not earned me one copper coin, it was some comfort to think that Candelaria's never-to-be-forgotten generosity had saved me from being penniless; I was, in fact, returning to Paquíta well dressed, on a splendid horse, and with dollars enough in my pocket to take us comfortably out of the country. Santos rode out with me, ostensibly to put me on the right road to Montevideo; only I knew, of course, that he was the bearer of an important communication from Demetria. When we had ridden about half a league without any approach to the subject on his part, in spite of sundry hints I threw out, I asked him plainly if he had a message for me.

After pondering over the question for as long a time as would be necessary to work out a rather difficult mathematical problem, he answered that he had.

"Then," said I, "let me hear it."

He grinned. "Do you think," he said, "that it is a thing to be spoken in half a dozen words? I have not come all this distance merely to say that the moon came in dry, or that yesterday, being Friday, Doña Demetria tasted no meat. It is a long story, señor."

"How many leagues long? Do you intend it to last all the way to Montevideo? The longer it is the sooner you ought to begin it."

"There are things easy to say, and there are other things not so easy," returned Santos. "But as to saying anything on horseback, who could do that?"

"Why not?"

"The question!" said he. "Have you not observed that when liquor is drawn from a cask—wine, or bitter orange juice to make orangeade, or even rum, which is by nature white and clear—that it runs thick when the cask is shaken? It is the same with us, señor; our brain is the cask out of which we draw all the things we say."

"And the spigot——"

"That is so," he struck in, pleased with my ready intelligence; "the mouth is the spigot."

"I should have thought the nose more like the spigot," I replied.

"No," he gravely returned. "You can make a loud noise with the nose when you snore or blow it in a handkerchief; but it has no door of communication with the brain. The things that are in the brain flow out by the mouth."

"Very well," said I, getting impatient, "call the mouth

spigot, bung-hole, or what you like, and the nose merely an ornament on the cask. The thing is this. Doña Demetria has entrusted you with some liquor to pass on to me; now pass it, thick or clear."

"Not thick," he answered stubbornly.

"Very well; clear then," I shouted.

"To give it to you clear I must give it off and not on my horse, sitting still and not moving."

Anxious to have it over without more beating about the bush, I reined up my horse, jumped off and sat down on the grass without another word. He followed my example, and after seating himself in a comfortable position, deliberately drew out his tobacco-pouch and began making a cigarette. I could not quarrel with him for this further delay, for without the soothing, stimulating cigarette an Oriental finds it difficult to collect his thoughts. Leaving him to carry out his instructions in his own laborious fashion, I vented my irritation on the grass, plucking it up by handfuls.

"Why do you do that?" he asked, with a grin.

"Pluck grass? What a question! When a person sits down on the grass, what is the first thing he does?"

"Makes a cigarette," he returned.

"In my country he begins plucking up the grass," I said.

"In the Banda Orientál we leave the grass for the cattle to eat," said he.

I at once gave up pulling the grass, for it evidently distracted his mind, and lighting a cigarette, began smoking as placidly as I could.

At length he began: "There is not in all the Banda Oriental a worse person to express things than myself."

"You are speaking the truth," I said.

"But what is to be done?" he continued, staring straight before him and giving as little heed to my interruption as a hunter riding at a stiff fence would pay to a remark about the weather. "When a man cannot get a knife, he breaks in two an old pair of sheep-shears and with one of the blades makes himself an implement which has to serve him for a knife. This is how it is with Doña Demetria; she has no one but her poor Santos to speak for her. If she had asked me to expose my life in her service, that I could easily have done; but to speak for her to a man who can read the almanac and knows the names of all the stars in the sky, that kills me, señor. And who knows this better than my mistress, who has been intimate with me from her infancy, when I often carried her in my arms? I can only say this, señor; when I speak, remember my poverty and that my mistress has no instrument except my poor tongue to convey her wishes. Words has she told me to say to you, but my devil of a memory has lost them all. What am I to do in this case? If I wished to buy my neighbour's horse and went to him and said, 'Sell me your horse, neighbour, for I have fallen in love with it and my heart is sick with desire, so that I must have it at any price,' would that not be madness, señor? Yet I must be like that imprudent person. I come to you for something, and all her expressions, which were like rare flowers culled from a garden, have been lost by the way. Therefore I can only

say this thing which my mistress desires, putting it in my own brute words, which are like wild flowers I have myself gathered on the plain, that have neither fragrance nor beauty to recommend them."

This quaint exordium did not advance matters much, but it had the effect of rousing my attention and convincing me that the message entrusted to Santos was one of very grave import. He had finished his first cigarette and now began slowly making himself a second one; but I waited patiently for him to speak, my irritation had quite vanished, those "wild flowers" of his were not without beauty, and his love and devotion for his unhappy mistress made them smell very sweet.

Presently he resumed: "Señor, you have told my mistress that you are a poor man; that you look upon this country life as a free and happy one; that above all things you would like to possess an estancia where you could breed cattle and race-horses and hunt ostriches. All this she has revolved in her mind, and because it is in her power to offer you the things you desire does she now ask you to aid her in her trouble. And now, señor, let me tell you this. The Peralta property extends all the way to the Rocha waters; five leagues of land, and there is none better in this department. It was formerly well stocked. There were thousands of cattle and mares; for my master's party then ruled in the country; the Colorados were shut up in Montevideo, and that cut-throat Frutos Rivera never came into this part. Of the cattle only a remnant remains, but the land is a fortune for any man, and when my old master dies Doña Demetria inherits

all. Even now it is hers, since her father has lost his calabash as you have seen. Now let me tell you what happened many years ago. Don Hilario was at first a peon—a poor boy the Colonel befriended. When he grew up he was made capatas, then mayordomo. Don Calixto was killed and the Colonel lost his reason, then Don Hilario made himself all-powerful, doing what he liked with his master, and setting Doña Demetria's authority aside. Did he protect the interests of the estancia? On the contrary, he was one with our enemies, and when they came like dogs for our cattle and horses he was behind them. This he did to make friends of the reigning party, when the Blancos had lost everything. Now he wishes to marry Doña Demetria to make himself owner of the land. Don Calixto is dead, and who is there to bell the cat? Even now he acts like the only owner; he buys and sells and the money is his. My mistress is scarcely allowed clothes to wear; she has no horse to ride on and is a prisoner in her own house. He watches her like a cat watching a bird shut in a room; if he suspected her of an intention to make her escape he would murder her. He has sworn to her that unless she marries him he will kill her. Is not this sad? Señor, she asks you to deliver her from this man. Her words I have forgotten, but imagine that you see her before you a suppliant on her knees, and that you know what the thing is she asks, and see her lips move, though you do not hear her words."

"Tell me how I can deliver her?" I said, feeling very much moved at what I had heard

"How! By carrying her off forcibly—do you understand? Is it not in your power to return in a few days' time with two or three friends to do this thing? You must come disguised and armed. If I am in the way I will do what I can to protect her, but you will easily knock me down and stun me—do you understand? Don Hilario must not know that we are in the plot. From him fear nothing, for though he is brave enough to threaten a woman with death, before armed men he is like a dog that hears thunder. You can then take her to Montevideo and conceal her there. The rest will be easy. Don Hilario will fail to find her; Ramona and I will take care of the Colonel, and when his daughter is out of his sight perhaps he will forget her. Then, señor, there will be no trouble about the property; for who can resist a legal claim?"

"I do not understand you, Santos," said I. "If Demetria wishes me to do what you say, and there is no other way to save her from Don Hilario's persecutions, I will do it. I will do anything to serve her, and I have no fear of that dog Hilario. But when I have placed her in concealment, who in Montevideo, where she is without a friend, will take up her cause and see that she is not defrauded of her rights? I can give her liberty, but that will be all."

"The property will be the same as yours when you marry her," said he.

I had never suspected that this was coming, and was amazed to hear it.

"Will you tell me, Santos," said I, "that Demetria sent you to say this to me? Does she think that only by marrying her I can deliver her from this robber and save her property?"

"There is, of course, no other way," said he. "If it could be done by other means would she not have spoken last night and explained everything to you? Consider, señor, all this large property will be yours. If you do not like this department then she will sell everything for you to buy an estancia elsewhere, or to do whatever you wish. And I ask you this, señor, could any man marry a better woman?"

"No," said I; "but, Santos, I cannot marry your mistress."

I remembered then, sadly enough, that I had told her next to nothing about myself. Seeing me so young, wandering homeless about the country, she had naturally taken me for a single man; and, perhaps thinking that I had conceived an affection for her, had been driven in her despair to make this proposal. Poor Demetria, was there to be no deliverance for her after all!

"Friend," said Santos, dropping the ceremonious señor in his anxiety to serve his mistress, "never speak without first considering all things. There is no woman like her. If you do not love her now you will love her when you know her better; no good man could help feeling affection for her. You saw her last evening in a green silk dress, also wearing a tortoise-shell comb and gold ornaments—was she not elegant, señor? Did she not then appear to your eyes a woman suitable for a wife? You

have been everywhere, and have seen many women, and perhaps in some distant place you have met one more beautiful than my mistress. But consider the life she has led! Grief has made her pale and thin, staining her face with purple under the eyes. Can laughter and song come out of a heart where fear is? Another life would change all; she would be a flower amongst women."

Poor old simple-minded Santos, he had done himself great injustice; his love for his mistress had inspired him with an eloquence that went to my heart. And poor Demetria, driven by her weary desolate life and torturing fears to make in vain this unwomanly proposal to a stranger! And after all it was not unwomanly; for in all countries where they are not abject slaves it is permissible for women in some circumstances to propose marriage. Even in England it is so, where society is like a huge Clapham Junction, with human creatures moving like trucks and carriages on cast-iron conventional rails, which they can only leave at the risk of a destructive collision. And a proposal of the kind was never more justifiable than in this case. Shut away from the sight of men in her dreary seclusion, haunted by nameless fears, her offer was to bestow her hand along with a large property on a penniless adventurer. Nor had she done this before she had learnt to love me, and to think, perhaps, that the feeling was returned. She had waited, too, till the very last moment, only making her offer when she had despaired of its coming from me. This

explained the reception of the previous evening; the ancient splendid attire which she had worn to win favour in my sight; the shy, wistful expression of her eyes, the hesitation she could not overcome. When I had recovered from the first shock of surprise I could only feel the greatest respect and compassion for her, bitterly regretting that I had not told her all my past history, so that she might have been spared the shame and grief she would now be compelled to endure. These sad thoughts passed through my mind while Santos expatiated on the advantages of the proposed alliance until I stopped him.

"Say no more," I said; "for I swear to you, Santos, that were it possible I would gladly take Demetria for a wife, so greatly do I admire and esteem her. But I am married. Look at this; it is my wife's portrait"; and taking from my bosom the miniature which I always wore round my neck, I handed it to him.

He stared at me in silent astonishment for a few moments, then took the portrait into his hand; and while he gazed admiringly at it I pondered over what I had heard. I could not now think of leaving this poor woman who had offered herself with all her inheritance to me without some attempt to rescue her from her sad position. She had given me a refuge when I was in trouble and danger, and the appeal she had just made to me, accompanied by so convincing a proof of her trust and affection, would have gone to the heart of the most cold-blooded man in existence, to make him, in spite of his nature, her devoted champion.

At length Santos handed back the miniature with a sigh. "Such a face as that my eyes have never seen," he remarked. "There is nothing more to be said."

"There is a great deal more to be said," I returned. "I have thought of an easy plan to help your mistress. When you have reported this conversation, tell her to remember the offer of assistance made to her last night. I said I would be a brother to her, and I shall keep my promise. You three cannot think of any better scheme to save Demetria than this one you have told me, but it is after all a very poor scheme, full of difficulty and danger to her. My plan is a simpler and safer one. Tell her to come out to-night at midnight, after the moon has set, to meet me under the trees behind the house. I shall be there waiting with a horse for her, and will take her away to some safe place of concealment where Don Hilario will never find her. When she is once out of his power it will be time enough to think of some way to turn him out of the estancia and to arrange matters. See that she does not fail to meet me, and let her take a few clothes and some money if she has any; also her jewels, for it would not be safe to leave them in the house with Don Hilario."

Santos was delighted with my scheme, which was so much more practical though less romantic than the one hatched by those three simple-minded conspirators. With heart full of hope he was about to leave me when he suddenly exclaimed, "But, señor, how will you get a horse and side-saddle for Doña Demetria?"

"Leave it all to me," I said; then we separated, he to return to his mistress, who was no doubt anxiously waiting to know the result of our conversation, I to get through the next fifteen hours in the best way I could.

CHAPTER XXVI

LOCK AND KEY AND SINNERS THREE

AFTER leaving Santos I rode on to a belt of wood about two miles east of the road, and passing through it surveyed the country lying beyond. The only habitation near it was a shepherd's lonely rancho, standing on an open plain of yellow grass, over which a scattered flock of sheep and a few horses were grazing. I determined to remain in the wood till near noon, then proceed to the rancho to get breakfast, and commence my search for a horse and side-saddle in the neighbourhood. After unsaddling my horse and tying him to a tree, where there were some pickings of grass and herbage about the roots, I lit a cigar and made myself comfortable on my rugs in the shade. Presently I had some visitors in a flock of *urracas*, or magpies, as they are called in the vernacular, or Guira cuckoos; a graceful, loquacious bird resembling a magpie, only with a longer tail and a bold, red beak. These ill-mannered birds skulked about in the branches over me all the time I remained in the wood, scolding me so incessantly in their intolerably loud, angry, rattling notes, varied occasionally with shrill whistlings and groans, that I could scarcely even hear myself think. They soon succeeded in bringing all the

other birds within hearing-distance to the spot to take part in the demonstration. It was unreasonable of the cuckoos, to say the least of it, for it was now long past their breeding season, so that parental solicitude could not be pleaded as an excuse for their churlish behaviour. The others—tanagers, finches, tyrant-birds; red, white, blue, grey, yellow, and mixed—were, I must own, less troublesome, for, after hopping about for a while, screaming, chirping, and twittering, they very sensibly flew away, no doubt thinking their friends the cuckoos were making a great deal too much fuss. My sole mammalian visitor was an armadillo, that came hurrying towards me, looking curiously like a little old bent-backed gentleman in a rusty black coat trotting briskly about on some very important business. It came to within three yards of my feet, then stopped, and seemed astonished beyond measure at my presence, staring at me with its little, bleary, blinking eyes, and looking more like the shabby old gentleman than ever. Then it trotted away through the trees, but presently returned for a second inspection; and after that it kept coming and going till I inadvertently burst out laughing, whereupon it scuttled away in great alarm, and returned no more. I was sorry I had frightened the amusing little beggar, for I felt in that exceedingly light-hearted mood when one's merriment is ready to brim over at the slightest provocation. Yet that very morning poor Demetria's appeal had deeply stirred my heart, and I was now embarked on a most Quixotic and perhaps perilous adventure! Possibly the very fact of that adventure being before me had produced an exhilarat-

ing effect on my mind, and made it impossible for me to be sad or even decently composed.

After spending a couple of hours in the pleasant shade, the blue smoke ascending from the rancho before me gave notice of the approaching breakfast hour; so, saddling my horse, I went to make my morning call, the cuckoos hailing my departure with loud, mocking shouts and whistling calls, meant to inform all their feathered friends that they had at last succeeded in making their haunt too hot for me.

At the rancho I was received by a somewhat surly-looking young man, with long, intensely black hair and moustache, and who wore in place of a hat a purple cotton handkerchief tied about his head. He did not seem to be over-pleased at my visit, and invited me rather ungraciously to alight if I thought proper. I followed him into the kitchen, where his little brown-skinned wife was preparing breakfast, and I fancied after seeing her that her prettiness was the cause of his inhospitable manner towards a stranger. She was singularly pretty, with a seductive soft brown skin, ripe pouting lips of a rich purple-red, and when she laughed, which happened very frequently, her teeth glistened like pearls. Her crisp black hair hung down unbound and disordered, for she looked like a very careless little beauty; but when she saw me enter, she blushed and tossed her tresses away from her shoulders, then carefully felt the pendants dropping from her ears to assure herself that they were safe, or possibly to attract my attention to them. The frequent glances her laughing dark eyes shot at me soon

convinced me that she was one of those charming little wives—charming, that is, when they are the wives of other people—who are not satisfied with a husband's admiration.

I had timed my arrival well, for the roast lamb over the coals was just assuming a deep golden brown colour, and sending out a most delicious fragrance. During the repast which followed I amused my auditors, and myself, by telling a few innocent lies, and began by saying that I was on my return to Rocha from Montevideo.

The shepherd remarked suspiciously that I was not on the right road.

I answered that I knew it; then proceeded to say that I had met with a misfortune on the previous evening, which in the end had led me out of the right road. I had only been married a few days, I continued, and at this declaration my host looked relieved, while little gipsy suddenly seemed to lose all interest in me.

"My wife," I said, "set her heart on having a side-saddle, as she is very fond of riding; so, having business which took me to town, I there purchased one for her, and was returning with it on a led horse—my wife's horse, unfortunately—when I stopped last evening to get some refreshment at a *pulpería* on the road. While eating some bread and sausage a tipsy person, who happened to be there, imprudently began to explode some fire-crackers, which so terrified the horses tied at the gate that several of them broke loose and escaped. My wife's horse with the side-saddle on him escaped with them; then mounting my own horse I started in pursuit, but failed to overtake

the runaway. Finally it joined a herd of mares, and these becoming terrified, fled from me, leading me a chase of several leagues, till I lost sight of them in the darkness."

"If your wife resembles mine in disposition, friend,' said he, with a somewhat sorrowful smile, "you would have continued following that runaway animal with the side-saddle to the end of the world."

"I can say this," I returned gravely, "without a side-saddle, good or bad, I am not going to present myself before her. I intend inquiring at every house on my way to the Lomas de Rocha till I can hear of one for sale."

"What will you give for one?" said he, becoming interested.

"That will depend on its condition. If it is as good as new I will give the amount it cost and two dollars profit besides."

"I know of a side-saddle that cost ten dollars a year ago, but it has never been used. It belongs to a neighbour three leagues from here, and she would sell it, I believe."

"Show me the house," I said, "and I will go directly and offer twelve dollars for it."

"You speak of Doña Petrona's side-saddle, Antonio?" said the little wife. "She would sell it for what it cost—perhaps for eight dollars. Ah, pumpkin-head, why did you not think to make all that profit? Then I could have bought slippers and a thousand things."

"You are never satisfied, Cleta," he returned. "Have you not got slippers to your feet?"

She tossed up a pretty foot and displayed it cased in

rather a shabby little slipper. Then with a laugh she kicked it off towards him. "There," she exclaimed, "put it in your bosom and keep it—something precious! And some day when you go to Montevideo, and wish to appear very grand before all the town, wear it on your great toe."

"Who expects reason from a woman?" said Antonio, shrugging his shoulders.

"Reason! you have no more brains than a Muscovy duck, Antonio. You might have made this profit, but you never can make money like other men, and therefore you will always be poorer than the spiders. I have said this before very often and only hope you will not forget it, for in future I intend to speak of other things."

"Where would I have got the ten dollars to pay Petrona for the saddle?" he retorted, losing his temper.

"My friend," I said, "if the saddle can be had it is only just that you should have the profit. Take ten dollars, and if you buy it for me I will pay you two more."

This proposal pleased him greatly, while Cleta, the volatile, clapped her hands with delight. While Antonio prepared to go to his neighbour's after the saddle I went out to a solitary thorn tree about fifty yards from the rancho, and spreading my poncho in the shade lay down to sleep the siesta.

Before the shepherd had been long gone I heard a great noise in the house, like banging on doors and on copper vessels, but took no notice, supposing it to proceed from Cleta engaged in some unusually noisy domestic operation. At length I heard a voice calling to me, "Señor! Señor!"

Getting up I went to the kitchen, but no person was

there. Suddenly a loud knock was given on the door communicating with the second room. "Oh, my friend," cried Cleta's voice behind it, "my ruffian of a husband has locked me in—can you let me out, do you think?"

"Why has he locked you in?" I asked.

"The question! Because he is a brute, of course. He always does it when he goes out. Is it not horrible?"

"It only shows how fond he is of you," I returned.

"Are you so atrocious as to defend him? And I thought you had a heart—so handsome, too! When I saw you I said, Ah, had I married this man what a happy life!"

"Thank you for your good opinion," I said. "I am very sorry you are locked in because it prevents me from seeing your pretty face."

"Oh, you think it pretty? Then you *must* let me out. I have put up my hair now, and look prettier than when you saw me."

"You look prettier with it down," I answered.

"Ah, down it goes again then!" she exclaimed—"Yes, you are right, it does look best that way. Is it not like silk? You shall feel it when you liberate me."

"That I cannot do, Cletita mine. Your Antonio has taken away the key."

"Oh, cruel man! He left me no water and I am perishing with thirst. What shall I do? Look, I will put my hand under the door for you to feel how hot it is; I am consumed with fever and thirst in this oven."

Presently her little brown hand came out at my feet, there being sufficient space between the floor and wood to

pass it through. I stooped and took it in mine, and found it a hot, moist little hand, with a pulse beating very fast.

"Poor child!" I said, "I will pour some water in a plate and pass it to you under the door."

"Oh, you are bad to insult me!" she cried. "What. am I a cat to drink water from a plate? I could cry my eyes out"; here followed sob-like sounds. "Besides," she suddenly resumed, "it is fresh air, not water, I require. I am suffocated, I cannot breathe. Oh, dear friend, save me from fainting. Force back the door till the bolt slips out."

"No, no, Cleta, it cannot be done."

"What, with your strength! I could almost do it myself with my poor little hands. Open, open, open, before I faint."

She had evidently sunk down on the floor sobbing, after making that practical suggestion; and casting about for burglarious implements to aid me, I found the spit and a wedge-shaped piece of hard wood. These I inserted just above and below the lock, and forcing back the door on its frame, I soon had the satisfaction of seeing the bolt slip from the catch.

Out sprang Cleta, flushed, tearful, her hair all in disorder, but laughing gleefully at having regained her liberty.

"Oh, dear friend, I thought you were going to leave me!" she cried. "How agitated I am—feel how my heart beats. Never mind, I can now pay that wretch out. Is not revenge sweet, sweet, sweet?"

"Now, Cleta," I said, "take three mouthfuls of fresh air and a drink of water, then let me lock you in again."

She laughed mockingly, and shook her hair like a wild young colt.

"Ah, you are not serious—do you not think I know?" she cried. "Your eyes tell me everything. Besides, you could not shut me up again if you tried." Here she made a sudden dash at the door, but I caught her and held her a close prisoner.

"Let me go, monster—oh no, not monster, dear, sweet friend, beautiful as the—moon, sun, stars. I am dying for fresh air. I will come back to the oven before he returns. If he caught me out, what blows! Come, let us sit under the tree together."

"That would be disobeying your husband," I said, trying to look stern.

"Never mind, I will confess it all to the priest some day, then it will be as if it had never happened. Such a husband—poof! If you were not a married man—*are* you married? What a pity! Say again, am I pretty?"

"Say first, Cleta, have you a horse a woman can ride on, and if you have one, will you sell it to me?"

"Oh yes, the best horse in the Banda Orientál. They say it is worth six dollars—will you buy it for six dollars? No, I shall not sell it—I shall not tell you that I have a horse till you answer me. Am I pretty, sir stranger?"

"Tell me first about the horse, then ask me what you like."

"Nothing more will I tell you—not a word. Yes, everything. Listen. When Antonio comes back ask him

to sell you a horse for your wife to ride. He will try to sell you one of his own, a demon full of faults like his master; false-footed, lame in the shoulder, a roarer, old as the south wind. A black piebald—remember. Offer to buy a roan with a cream nose. That is my horse. Offer him six dollars. Now say, am I pretty?"

"Oh, beautiful, Cleta; your eyes are stars, your mouth is a rosebud, sweeter than honey a thousand times."

"Now you talk like a wise man," she laughed; then holding my hand, she led me to the tree and sat down by my side on the poncho.

"And how old are you, little one?" I asked.

"Fourteen—is that very old? Ah, fool, to tell my age truly—no woman does that. Why did I not say thirteen? And I have been married six months, such a long time! I am sure I have green, blue, yellow, grey hairs coming out all over my head by this time. And what about my hair, sir, you never spoke of that? Did I not let it down for you? Is it not soft and beautiful? Tell me, sir, what about my hair?"

"In truth it is soft and beautiful, Cleta, and covers you like a dark cloud."

"Does it not! Look, I will cover my face with it. Now I am hidden like the moon in a cloud, and now, look, out comes the moon again! I have a great respect for the moon. Say, holy friar, am I like the moon?"

"Say, little sweet lips, why do you call me holy friar?"

"Say first, holy friar, am I like the moon?"

"No, Cleta, you are not like the moon, though you are both married women; you are married to Antonio——"

"Poor me!"

"And the moon is married to the sun."

"Happy moon, to be so far from him!"

"The moon is a quiet wife, but you chatter like a paroquet."

"And am I not able to be quiet also, monk? Look, I will be quiet as the moon—not a word, not a breath." Then she threw herself back on the poncho, feigning sleep, her arms above her head, her hair scattered everywhere, only a tress or two half shading her flushed face and round heaving bosom that would not be quiet. There was just a little mocking smile on her lips, just a little gleam of laughing eyes under her drooping lashes, for she could not help watching my face for admiration. In such an attitude the tempting little witch might have made the tepid blood of an ascetic boil.

Two or three hours thus flew swiftly by while I listened to her lively prattle, which, like the lark's singing, had scarcely a pause in it, her attempt at being still and moonlike having ended in a perfect fiasco. At length, pouting her pretty lips and complaining of her hard lot, she said it was time to go back to her prison; but all the time I was engaged in forcing back the bolt into its place she chattered without ceasing. "Adieu, Sun, husband of the moon," she said. "Adieu, sweet, sweet friend, buyer of side-saddles! They were all lies you told—I know, I know. You want a horse and side-saddle to carry off some girl to-night. Happy she! Now I must sit in the dark alone, alone, alone, till Antonio, the atrocious comes to liberate me with his old iron key—ah fool!"

Before I had been long back under my tree, Antonio appeared, bringing the side-saddle in triumph on his horse before him. After going in to release his wife he came out and invited me to take maté. I then mentioned my wish to buy a good horse; he was only too willing to sell, and in a few minutes his horses were driven up for inspection. The black piebald was first offered, a very handsome, quiet-looking animal, apparently quite sound. The cream-nose, I noticed, was a bony, long-bodied brute, with sleepy eyes and a ewe neck. Could it be that the little double-dealing witch had intended to deceive me? But in a moment I dismissed such a suspicion with the scorn it merited. Let a woman be as false as she can, and able to fool her husband to the top of her bent, she is, compared with the man who wishes to sell you a horse, openness and truth itself. I examined the piebald critically, walking and trotting him round; looked into his mouth, then at hoofs and fetlocks, beloved of windgalls; gazed with fixed attention into his eyes, and dealt him a sudden brisk blow on the shoulder.

"No weak spot will you find, señor," said Antonio the mendacious, who was certainly the greatest of the three sinners met together in that place. "He is my best horse, only four years old, gentle as a lamb, sound as a bell. Sure-footed, señor, like no other horse; and with such an easy pace you can ride him at a gallop with a tumbler of water in your hand and not spill a drop. I will give him away to you for ten dollars, because you have been generous about the side-saddle, and I am anxious to serve you well."

"Thank you, my friend," I said. "Your piebald is fifteen years old, lame in the shoulders, broken in his wind, and has more vices than any seven horses in the Banda Orientál. I would not allow my wife to ride such a dangerous brute, for, as I told you, I have not been long married."

Antonio framed his face to express astonishment and virtue indignant; then with the point of his knife he scratched the figure of a cross on the ground, and was about to swear solemnly on it that I was egregiously mistaken, that his beast was a kind of equine angel, or a Pegasus, at least, when I interfered to stop him. "Tell as many lies as you like," I said, "and I will listen to them with the greatest interest; but do not swear on the figure of the cross to what is false, for then the four or five or six dollars profit you have made on the side-saddle will scarcely be sufficient to buy you absolution for such a sin."

He shrugged his shoulders and restored the sacrilegious knife to its sheath. "There are my horses," he said in an injured tone. "They are a kind of animal you seem to know a great deal about; select one and deceive yourself. I have endeavoured to serve you; but there are some people who do not know a friend when they see one."

I then minutely examined all the other horses, and finally finished the farce by leading out the roan cream-nose, and was pleased to notice the crestfallen expression of my good shepherd.

"Your horses do not suit me," I said, "so I cannot buy one. I will, however, purchase this old cow; for it

is the only animal here I could trust my wife on. You can have seven dollars for it—not one copper more, for like the Emperor of China, I speak once only."

He plucked off his purple headgear and scratched his raven head, then led me back to the kitchen to consult his wife, "For, señor," he said, "you have, by some fatality, selected her horse." When Cleta heard that seven dollars had been offered for the roan, she laughed with joy. "Oh, Antonio, he is only worth six dollars! Yes, señor, you shall have him, and pay the seven dollars to me. Not to my husband. Who will say now that I cannot make money? And now, Antonio, I have no horse to ride on, you can give me the bay with white fore-feet."

"Do not imagine such a thing!" exclaimed her husband.

After taking maté I left them to settle their affairs, not doubting which would come out best from a trial of skill. When I arrived in sight of Peralta's trees I unsaddled and picketed my horses, then stretched myself out on my rugs. After the excitements and pleasures of that day, which had robbed me of my siesta, I quickly fell into a very sound sleep.

CHAPTER XXVII

NIGHT AND FLIGHT

WHEN I woke I did not remember for some moment where I was. Feeling about me, my hand came in contact with the grass wet with dew. It was very dark, only low down in the sky a pale gleam of light gave promise, as I imagined, of coming day. Then recollection flashed upon me, and I sprang up alarmed to my feet, only to discover with inexpressible relief that the light I had remarked was in the west, not the east, and proceeded from the young moon just sinking beneath the horizon. Saddling my two animals expeditiously I rode to Peralta's estancia, and on arriving there carefully drew the horses into the shadow of a clump of trees growing on the borders of the ancient well-nigh obliterated foss or ditch. I then dropped on to the ground so as to listen better for approaching footsteps, and began waiting for Demetria. It was past midnight: not a sound reached me except at intervals the mournful far-away reedy note of the little nocturnal cicada that always seemed to be there lamenting the lost fortunes of the house of Peralta. For upwards of half an hour I remained lying on the ground, growing more anxious every moment and fearing that Demetria was going to

fail me, when I caught a sound like a human whisper. Listening intently, I found that it pronounced my name and proceeded from a clump of tall thorn-apples some yards from me.

"Who speaks?" I replied.

The tall, gaunt form of Ramona drew itself up out of the weeds and cautiously approached me. She was shaking with nervous excitement, and had not ventured to come near without speaking for fear of being mistaken for an enemy and fired at.

"Mother of Heaven!" she exclaimed as well as her chattering teeth would allow her to speak. "I have been so agitated all the evening! Oh, señor, what are we to do now? Your plan was such a good one; when I heard it I knew an angel had flown down and whispered it in your ear. And now my mistress will not stir! All her things are ready—clothes, money, jewels; and for the last hour we have been urging her to come out, but nothing will serve. She will not see you, señor."

"Is Don Hilario in the house?"

"No, he is out—could anything have been better? But it is useless, she has lost heart and will not come. She only sits crying in her room, saying that she cannot look on your face again."

"Go and tell her that I am here with the horses waiting for her," I said.

"Señor, she knows you are here. Santos watched for you and hastened in to inform her of your arrival. Now she has sent me out only to say that she cannot meet

you, that she thanks you for all you have done, and begs you to go away and leave her."

I was not greatly surprised at Demetria's reluctance to meet me at the last moment, but was determined not to leave without first seeing her and trying to change her mind. Securing the horses to a tree, I went with Ramona to the house. Stealing in on tiptoe, we found Demetria in that room where she had received me the evening before in her quaint finery, lying on the sofa, while old Santos stood by her the picture of distress. The moment she saw me enter she covered her face with her hands and turned from me. Yet a glance was sufficient to show that with or without her consent everything had been got ready for her flight. On a chair near her lay a pair of saddle-bags in which her few belongings had been stowed; a mantilla was drawn half over her head, and by her side was a large woollen shawl, evidently intended to protect her against the night air.

"Santos," I said, "go out to the horses under the trees and wait there for us: and you, Ramona, say good-bye now to your mistress, then leave us together; for by-and-by she will recover courage and go with me."

Santos, looking immensely relieved and grateful, though a little surprised at my confident tone, was hurrying out when I pointed to the saddle-bags. He nodded, grinned, and snatching them up left the room. Poor old Ramona threw herself on to her knees, sobbing and pouring out farewell blessings on her mistress, kissing her hands and hair with sorrowful devotion.

When she left us I sat down by Demetria's side, but she would not take her hands from her face or speak to me, and only wept hysterically when I addressed her. I succeeded at last in getting one of her hands in mine, and then drew her head gently down till it rested on my shoulder. When her sobs began to subside I said—

"Tell me, dear Demetria, have you lost faith in me that you fear to trust yourself with me now?"

"No, no, Richard, it is not that," she faltered. "But I can never look into your face again. If you have any compassion for me you will leave me now."

"What, leave you, Demetria, my sister, to that man—how can you imagine such a thing? Tell me, where is Don Hilario—is he coming back to-night?"

"I know nothing. He may come back at any moment. Leave me, Richard; every minute you remain here increases your danger." Then she attempted to draw away from me, but I would not release her.

"If you fear his returning to-night then it is time for you to come with me," I answered.

"No, no, no, I cannot. All is changed now. It would kill me with shame to look on your face again."

"You shall look on it again many times, Demetria. Do you think that after coming here to rescue you out of the coils of that serpent I am going to leave you because you are a little timid? Listen, Demetria, I shall save you from that devil to-night, even if I have to carry you out in my arms. Afterwards we can consider all there is to be done about your father and your property. Perhaps

when the poor Colonel is taken out of this sad atmosphere his health, his reason even, may improve."

"Oh, Richard, are you deceiving me?" she exclaimed, suddenly dropping her hands and gazing full into my face.

"No, I am not deceiving you. And now, you will lose all fear, Demetria, for you have looked into my face again and have not been changed to stone."

She turned crimson in a moment; but did not attempt to cover her face again, for just then a clatter of hoofs was heard approaching the house.

"Mother of Heaven, save us!" she exclaimed in terror. "It is Don Hilario."

I quickly blew out the one candle burning dimly in the room. "Fear nothing," I said. "When all is quiet after he has gone to his room we will make our escape."

She was trembling with apprehension and nestled close to me; while we both listened intently and heard Don Hilario unsaddle his horse, then going softly, whistling to himself, to his room.

"Now he has shut himself up," I said, "and in a few minutes will be asleep. When you think of that man whose persecutions have made your life a burden, so that you tremble when he approaches you, do you not feel glad that I have come to take you away?"

"Richard, I could go willingly with you to-night but for one thing. Do you think after what has passed that I could ever face your wife?"

"She will know nothing of what has passed, Demetria.

It would be dishonourable in me and a cruel injustice to you to speak to her of it. She will welcome you as a dear sister and love you as much as I love you. All these doubts and fears troubling you are very unsubstantial and can be blown away like thistle-down. And now that you have confessed so much to me, Demetria, I wish to confess also the one thing that troubles my heart."

"What is it, Richard, tell me?" she said very gently.

"Believe me, Demetria, I never had a suspicion that you loved me. Your manner did not show it, otherwise I should have told you long ago all about my past. I only knew you regarded me as a friend and one you could trust. If I have been mistaken all along, Demetria, if you have really felt a passion in your heart, then I shall have to lament bitterly that I have been the cause of a lasting sorrow to you. Will you not open your heart more to me and tell me frankly how it is with you?"

She caressed my hand in silence for a little while and then answered, "I think you were right, Richard. Perhaps I am not capable of passion like some women. I felt—I knew that you were my friend. To be near you was like sitting in the shade of a green tree in some hot, desolate place. I thought it would be pleasant to sit there always and forget the bitter years. But, Richard, if you will always be my friend—my brother, I shall be more than content, and my life will seem different."

"Demetria, how happy you have made me! Come, the serpent is sleeping now, let us steal away and leave him to

his evil dreams. God grant that I may return some day to bruise his head with my heel."

Then, wrapping the shawl about her, I led her out treading softly, and in a few moments we were with Santos, patiently keeping watch beside the horses.

I gladly let him assist Demetria to her seat on the side-saddle, for that was perhaps the last personal service he would be able to render her. The poor old fellow was crying, I believe, his utterance was so husky. Before leaving I gave him on a scrap of paper my address in Montevideo, and bade him take it to Don Florentino Blanco with a request to write me a letter in the course of the next two or three days to inform me of Don Hilario's movements. We then trotted softly away over the sward, and in about half an hour struck the road leading from Rocha to Montevideo. This we followed till daylight, scarcely pausing once from our swift gallop, and a hundred times during that dark ride over a country utterly unknown to me I blessed the little witch Cleta; for never was there a more steady, sure-footed beast than the ugly roan that carried my companion, and when we drew rein in the pale morning light he seemed fresh as when we started. We then left the highway and rode across country in a north-westerly direction for a distance of eight or nine miles, for I was anxious to be far away from public roads and from the prying, prating people that use them. About eleven o'clock that morning we had breakfast at a rancho, then rode on again till we came to a forest of scattered thorn trees growing on the slopes of

a range of hills. It was a wild, secluded spot, with water and good pasturage for the horses and pleasant shade for ourselves; so after unsaddling and turning loose our horses to feed we sat down to rest under a large tree with our backs against its portly trunk. From our shady retreat we commanded a splendid view of the country over which we had been riding all the morning extending for many leagues behind us, and while I smoked my cigar I talked to my companion, calling her attention to the beauty of that wide, sunlit prospect.

"Do you know, Demetria," I said, "when the long winter evenings come, and I have plenty of leisure, I intend writing a history of my wanderings in the Banda Oriental, and I will call my book *The Purple Land*; for what more suitable name can one find for a country so stained with the blood of her children? You will never read it, of course, for I shall write it in English and only for the pleasure it will give to my own children—if I ever have any—at some distant date, when their little moral and intellectual stomachs are prepared for other food than milk. But you will have a very important place in my narrative, Demetria, for during these last days we have been very much to each other. And perhaps the very last chapter will recount this wild ride of ours together, flying from that evil genius Hilario to some blessed refuge far away beyond the hills and woods and the blue line of the horizon. For when we reach the capital I believe—I think—I know, in fact——"

I hesitated to tell her that it would probably be necessary for me to leave the country immediately, but

she did not encourage me to go on, and glancing round I discovered that she was fast asleep.

Poor Demetria, she had been dreadfully nervous all night and almost afraid to stop to rest anywhere, but now her fatigue had quite overcome her. Her position against the tree was uncomfortable and insecure, so drawing her head very gently down until it rested on my shoulder, and shading her eyes with her mantilla, I let her sleep on. Her face looked strangely worn and pallid in that keen noonday light, and gazing on it while she slumbered, and remembering all the dark years of grief and anxiety she had endured down to that last pain of which I had been the innocent cause, I felt my eyes grow dim with compassion.

After sleeping for about two hours she woke with a start and was greatly distressed to learn that I had been supporting her all that time. But after that refreshing slumber a change seemed to come over her. Not only her great fatigue, but the tormenting apprehensions had very nearly vanished. Out of the nettle Danger she had plucked the flower Safety, and now she could rejoice in its possession and was filled with new life and spirits. The unaccustomed freedom and exercise with constant change of scene also had an exhilarating effect on mind and body. A new colour came into her pale cheeks; the purple stains telling of anxious days and sleepless nights faded away; she smiled brightly and was full of animation, so that on that long journey, whether resting in the noonday shade or swiftly cantering over the green turf, I could not have had a more agreeable companion than

Demetria. This change in her often made me remember Santos' pathetic words when he told of the ravages of grief, and said that another life would make his mistress a "flower amongst women." It was a comfort that her affection for me had been, indeed, nothing but affection. But what was I to do with her in the end? for I knew that my wife was most anxious to return without further delay to her own country; and yet it seemed to me that it would be a hard thing to leave poor Demetria behind amongst strangers. Finding her so improved in spirits, I at length ventured to speak to her on the subject. At first she was depressed, but presently, recovering courage, she begged to be allowed to go with us to Buenos Ayres. The prospect of being left alone was unendurable to her, for in Montevideo she had no personal friends, while the political friends of her family were all out of the country or living in very close retirement. Across the water she would be with friends and safe for a season from her dreaded enemy. This proposal seemed a very sensible one and relieved my mind very much, although it only served to remove my difficulty for a time.

In the department of Camelones, about six leagues from Montevideo, I found the house of a fellow-countryman named Barker, who had lived for many years in the country and had a wife and children. We arrived in the afternoon at his estancia, and seeing that Demetria was very much knocked up with our long journey, I asked Mr. Barker to give us shelter for the night. Our host was very kind and pleasant with us, asking no disagreeable questions, and after a few hours' acquaintance, which

made us quite intimate, I took him aside and told him Demetria's history, whereupon, like the good-hearted fellow he was, he at once offered to shelter her in his house until matters could be arranged in Montevideo, an offer which was joyfully accepted.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GOOD-BYE TO THE PURPLE LAND

I WAS soon back in Montevideo after that. When I bade Demetria good-bye she appeared reluctant to part with me, retaining my hand in hers for an unusual time. For the first time in her life, probably, she was about to be left in the company of entire strangers, and for many days past we had been much to each other, so that it was only natural she should cling to me a little at parting. Once more I pressed her hand and exhorted her to be of good courage, reminding her that in a very few days all trouble and danger would be over; still, however, she did not release my hand. This tender reluctance to lose me was affecting and also flattering, but slightly inopportune, for I was anxious to be in the saddle and away. Presently she said, glancing down at her rusty habiliments, "Richard, if I am to remain concealed here till I go to join you on board, then I must meet your wife in these poor garments."

"Oh, *that* is what you are thinking about, Demetria!" I exclaimed.

At once I called in our kind hostess, and when this serious matter was explained to her she immediately offered to go to Montevideo to procure the necessary

outfit, a thing I had thought nothing about, but which had evidently been preying on Demetria's mind.

When I at length reached the little suburban retreat of my aunt (by marriage), Paquita and I acted for some time like two demented persons, so overjoyed were we at meeting after our long separation. I had received no letters from her, and only two or three of the score I had written had reached their destination, so that we had ten thousand questions to ask and answers to make. She could never gaze enough at me or finish admiring my bronzed skin and the respectable moustache I had grown; while she, poor darling! looked unusually pale, yet withal so beautiful that I marvelled at myself for having, after possessing her, considered any other woman even passably good-looking. I gave her a circumstantial account of my adventures, omitting only a few matters I was in honour bound not to disclose.

Thus, when I told her the story of my sojourn at the estancia Peralta, I said nothing to betray Demetria's confidence; nor did I think it necessary to mention the episode of that wicked little sprite, Cleta; with the result that she was pleased at the chivalrous conduct I had displayed throughout the whole of that affair, and was ready to take Demetria to her heart.

I had not been back twenty-four hours in Montevideo before a letter from the Lomas de Rocha storekeeper came to justify my caution in having left Demetria at some distance from the town. The letter informed me that Don Hilario had quickly guessed that I had carried off his unhappy master's daughter, and that no doubt was

left in his mind when he discovered that on the day I left the estancia a person answering to my description in every particular had purchased a horse and side-saddle and had ridden off towards the estancia in the evening. My correspondent warned me that Don Hilario would be in Montevideo even before his letter, also that he had discovered something about my connection with the late rebellion, and would be sure to place the matter in the hands of the government, so as to have me arrested, after which he would have little difficulty in compelling Demetria to return to the estancia.

For a moment this intelligence dismayed me. Luckily, Paquíta was out of the house when it came, and fearing that she might return and surprise me while I was in that troubled state, I rushed out; then, skulking through back streets and narrow lanes, peering cautiously about in fear of encountering the minions of the law, I made my escape out of the town. My only desire just then was to get away into some place of safety where I would be able to think over the position quietly, and if possible devise some plan to defeat Don Hilario, who had been a little too quick for me. Of many schemes that suggested themselves to my mind, while I sat in the shade of a cactus hedge about a mile from town, I finally determined, in accordance with my old and well-tried rule, to adopt the boldest one, which was to go straight back to Montevideo and claim the protection of my country. The only trouble was that on my way thither I might be caught, and then Paquíta would be in terrible distress about me, and perhaps Demetria's escape would be pre-

vented. While I was occupied with these thoughts I saw a closed carriage pass by driven towards the town by a tipsy-looking coachman. Coming out of my hiding-place I managed to stop him and offered him two dollars to drive me to the British Consulate. The carriage was a private one, but the two dollars tempted the man, so after securing the fare in advance he allowed me to get in, and then I closed the windows, leant back on the cushion, and was driven rapidly and comfortably to the house of refuge. I introduced myself to the Consul, and told him a story concocted for the occasion, a judicious mixture of truth and lies, to the effect that I had been unlawfully and forcibly seized and compelled to serve in the Blanco army, and that having escaped from the rebels and made my way to Montevideo, I was amazed to hear that the government proposed arresting me. He asked me a few questions, looked at the passport which he had sent me a few days before, then laughing good-humouredly put on his hat and invited me to accompany him to the War Office close by. The secretary, Colonel Arocena, he informed me, was a personal friend of his, and if we could see him it would be all right. Walking by his side I felt quite safe and bold again, for I was, in a sense, walking with my hand resting on the superb mane of the British Lion, whose roar was not to be provoked with impunity. At the War Office I was introduced by the Consul to his friend, Colonel Arocena, a genial old gentleman with a bald head and a cigarette between his lips. He listened with some interest and a smile, slightly incredulous I thought, to the sad story of the ill-treatment I had been

subjected to at the hands of Santa Coloma's rebellious rascals. When I had finished he pushed over a sheet of paper on which he had scrawled a few words to me with the remark, "Here, my young friend, take this, and you will be safe in Montevideo. We have heard about your doings in Florida, also in Rocha, but we do not propose going to war with England on your account."

At this speech we all laughed; then when I had pocketed the paper, which bore the sacred seal of the War Office on the margin and requested all persons to refrain from molesting the bearer in his lawful outgoings and incomings, we thanked the pleasant old Colonel and retired. I spent half an hour strolling about with the Consul, then we separated. I had noticed two men in military uniform at some distance from us when we were together, and now returning homewards I found that they were following me. By-and-by they overtook me and politely intimated their intention of making me their prisoner. I smiled, and drawing forth my protection from the War Office, handed it to them. They looked surprised, and gave it back, with an apology for having molested me, then left me to pursue my way in peace.

I had, of course, been very lucky throughout all this adventure; still I did not wish to attribute my easy escape entirely to luck, for I had, I thought, contributed a good deal towards it by my promptness in acting and in inventing a plausible story on the spur of the moment.

Feeling very much elated, I strolled along the sunny streets, gaily swinging my cane, when turning a corner near Doña Isidora's house I suddenly came face to face

with Don Hilario. This unexpected encounter threw us both off our guard, he recoiling two or three paces backward and turning as pale as the nature of his complexion would allow. I recovered first from the shock. So far I had been able to baffle him, and knew, moreover, many things of which he was ignorant; still, he was there in the town with me and had to be reckoned with, and I quickly resolved to meet him as a friend, affecting entire ignorance of his object in coming to Montevideo.

"Don Hilario—you here! Happy the eyes that behold you," I exclaimed, seizing and shaking his hand, pretending to be overjoyed at the meeting.

In a moment he recovered his usual self-possessed manner, and when I asked after Doña Demetria he answered after a moment's hesitation that she was in very good health.

"Come, Don Hilario," I said, "we are close to my aunt Isidora's house where I am staying, and it will give me great pleasure to present you to my wife, who will be glad to thank you for your kindness to me at the estancia."

"Your wife, Don Ricardo! Do you tell me that you are married?" he exclaimed in amazement, thinking probably that I was already the husband of Demetria.

"What, did I not tell you before!" I said. "Ah, I remember speaking to Doña Demetria about it. Strange that she has not mentioned it to you. Yes, I was married before coming to this country—my wife is an Argentine. Come with me and you shall see a beautiful woman, if that is an inducement."

He was without doubt astonished and mystified, but he had recovered his mask, and was now polite, collected, watchful.

When we entered the house I presented him to Doña Isidora, who happened to be in the way, and left her to entertain him. I was very glad to do so, knowing that he would seize the opportunity to try and discover something from the garrulous old lady, and that he would discover nothing since she had not been let into our secrets.

I found Paquíta lying down in her room having a siesta; and while she arrayed herself at my express desire in her best dress — a black velvet which set off her matchless beauty better than anything else, I told her how I wished her to treat Don Hilario. She knew all about him, of course, and hated him with all her heart, looking on him as a kind of evil genius from whose castle I had carried off the unhappy Demetria; but I made her understand that our wisest plan was to treat him graciously. She readily consented, for Argentine women can be more charmingly gracious than any other women on the globe, and what people do well they like to be called on to do.

The subtle caution of our snaky guest did not serve to hide from my watchful eyes that he was very much surprised when he beheld her. She placed herself near him and spoke in her sweetest artless manner of the pleasure my return had given her, and of the gratitude she had felt towards him and all the people at the estancia Peralta for the hospitable treatment I had received there.

He was, as I had foreseen, completely carried away by her exquisite beauty and the charm of her manner towards him. He was flattered, and exerted himself to be agreeable, but at the same time he was very much puzzled. The baffled expression was more apparent on his face every moment, while his restless glances darted here and there about the room, yet ever returned, like the doomed moth to the candle, to those lustrous violet eyes overflowing with hypocritical kindness. Paquíta's acting delighted me, and I only hoped that he would long suffer from the effect of the subtle poison she was introducing into his system. When he rose to go I was sure that Demetria's disappearance was a greater mystery to him than ever; and as a parting shot I warmly invited him to come and see us frequently while he remained in the capital, even offering him a bed in the house; while Paquíta, not to be behindhand, for she had thoroughly entered into the fun of the thing, entrusted him with a prettily worded affectionate message to Demetria, a person whom she already loved and hoped some day to meet.

Two days after this adventure I heard that Don Hilario had left Montevideo. That he had discovered nothing I was positive; it was possible, however, that he had left some person to watch the house, and as Paquíta was now anxious to get back to her own country I determined to delay our departure no longer.

Going down to the harbour, I found the captain of a small schooner trading between Montevideo and Buenos Ayres, and learning that he intended leaving for the last

port in three days' time, I bargained with him to take us, and got him also to consent to receive Demetria on board at once. I then sent a message to Mr. Barker, asking him to bring his guest up to town and put her on board the schooner without coming near me. Two days later, early in the morning, I heard that she was safe on board; and having thus baffled the scoundrel Hilario, on whose ophidian skull I should have been very pleased to set my heel, and having still an idle day before me, I went once more to visit the mountain, to take from its summit my last view of the Purple Land where I had spent so many eventful days.

When I approached the crest of the great, solitary hill I did not gaze admiringly on the magnificent view that opened before me, nor did the wind, blowing fresh from the beloved Atlantic, seem to exhilarate me. My eyes were cast down and I dragged my feet like one that was weary. Yet I was not weary, but now I began to remember that on a former occasion I had on this mountain spoken many vain and foolish things concerning a people about whose character and history I was then ignorant. I also remembered with exceeding bitterness that my visit to this land had been the cause of great and perhaps lasting sorrow to one noble heart.

How often, said I to myself, have I repented of those cruel, scornful words I addressed to Dolores at our last interview, and now once more "I come to pluck the berries harsh and crude" of repentance and of expiation, to humble my insular pride in the dust and unsay all the unjust things I formerly spoke in my haste.

It is not an exclusively British characteristic to regard the people of other nationalities with a certain amount of contempt, but with us, perhaps, the feeling is stronger than with others, or else expressed with less reserve. Let me now at last rid myself of this error, which is harmless and perhaps even commendable in those who stay at home, and also very natural, since it is a part of our unreasonable nature to distrust and dislike the things that are far removed and unfamiliar. Let me at last divest myself of these old English spectacles, framed in oak and with lenses of horn, to bury them for ever in this mountain, which for half a century and upwards has looked down on the struggles of a young and feeble people against foreign aggression and domestic foes, and where a few months ago I sang the praises of British civilisation, lamenting that it had been planted here and abundantly watered with blood, only to be plucked up again and cast into the sea. After my rambles in the interior, where I carried about in me only a fading remnant of that old time-honoured superstition to prevent the most perfect sympathy between me and the natives I mixed with, I cannot say that I am of that opinion now. I cannot believe that if this country had been conquered and recolonised by England, and all that is crooked in it made straight according to our notions, my intercourse with the people would have had the wild, delightful flavour I have found in it. And if that distinctive flavour cannot be had along with the material prosperity resulting from Anglo-Saxon energy, I must breathe the wish that this land may never know such prosperity. I do not wish to

be murdered; no man does; yet rather than see the ostrich and deer chased beyond the horizon, the flamingo and black-necked swan slain on the blue lakes, and the herdsman sent to twang his romantic guitar in Hades as a preliminary to security of person, I would prefer to go about prepared at any moment to defend my life against the sudden assaults of the assassin.

We do not live by bread alone, and British occupation does not give to the heart all the things for which it craves. Blessings may even become curses when the gigantic power that bestows them on us scares from our midst the shy spirits of Beauty and of Poesy. Nor is it solely because it appeals to the poetic feelings in us that this country endears itself to my heart. It is the perfect republic: the sense of emancipation experienced in it by the wanderer from the Old World is indescribably sweet and novel. Even in our ultra-civilised condition at home we do periodically escape back to nature; and, breathing the fresh mountain air and gazing over vast expanses of ocean or land, we find that she is still very much to us. It is something more than these bodily sensations we experience when first mingling with our fellow-creatures, where all men are absolutely free and equal as here. I fancy I hear some wise person exclaiming, "No, no, no! In name only is your Purple Land a republic; its constitution is a piece of waste paper, its government an oligarchy tempered by assassination and revolution." True; but the knot of ambitious rulers all striving to pluck each other down have no power to make the people miserable. The unwritten constitution, mightier than

the written one, is in the heart of every man to make him still a republican and free with a freedom it would be hard to match anywhere else on the globe. The Bedouin himself is not so free, since he accords an almost superstitious reverence and implicit obedience to his sheikh. Here the lord of many leagues of land and of herds unnumbered sits down to talk with the hired shepherd, a poor, bare-footed fellow in his smoky rancho, and no class or caste difference divides them, no consciousness of their widely different positions chills the warm current of sympathy between two human hearts. How refreshing it is to meet with this perfect freedom of intercourse, tempered only by that innate courtesy and native grace of manner peculiar to Spanish Americans! What a change to a person coming from lands with higher and lower classes, each with its innumerable hateful subdivisions—to one who aspires not to mingle with the class above him, yet who shudders at the slouching carriage and abject demeanour of the class beneath him! If this absolute equality is inconsistent with perfect political order, I for one should grieve to see such order established. Moreover, it is by no means true that the communities which oftenest startle us with crimes of disorder and violence are morally worse than others. A community in which there are not many crimes cannot be morally healthy There were practically *no* crimes in Peru under the Inca dynasty; it was a marvellous thing for a person to commit an offence in that empire. And the reason for this most unnatural state of things was this—the Inca system of government was founded on that most iniquitous and

disastrous doctrine that the individual bears the same relation to the state as a child to its parent, that its life from the cradle to the grave must be regulated for it by a power it is taught to regard as omniscient—a power practically omnipresent and almighty. In such a state there could be no individual will, no healthy play of passions, and consequently no crime. What wonder that a system so unspeakably repugnant to a being who feels that his will is a divinity working within him fell to pieces at the first touch of foreign invasion, or that it left no vestige of its pernicious existence on the continent it had ruled! For the whole state was, so to speak, putrid even before dissolution, and when it fell it mingled with the dust and was forgotten. Poland, before its conquest by Russia, a country ill-governed and disorderly as the Banda Orientál, did not mingle with the dust like that when it fell—the implacable despotism of the Czar was unable to crush its fierce spirit; its *Will* still survived to gild dreary oppression with hallowed dreams, to make it clutch with a fearful joy the dagger concealed in its bosom. But I had no need to go away from this Green Continent to illustrate the truth of what I have said. People who talk and write about the disorderly South American republics are fond of pointing to Brazil, that great, peaceful, progressive empire, as setting an example to be followed. An orderly country, yes, and the people in it steeped to their lips in every abominable vice! Compared with these emasculated children of the equator, the Orientals are nature's noblemen.

I can very well imagine some over-righteous perso

saying, "Alas, poor deluded soul, how little importance can we attach to your specious apologies of a people's lawlessness, when your own personal narrative shows that the moral atmosphere you have been breathing has quite corrupted you! Go back over your own record, and you will find that you have, according to *our* notions, offended in various ways and on divers occasions, and that you are even without the grace to repent of all the evil things you have thought, said, and done."

I have not read many books of philosophy, because when I tried to be a philosopher "happiness was always breaking in," as someone says; also because I have loved to study men rather than books; but in the little I have read there occurs a passage I remember well, and this I shall quote as my answer to anyone who may call me an immoral person because my passions have not always remained in a quiescent state, like hounds—to quote the simile of a South American poet—slumbering at the feet of the huntsman resting against a rock at noon. "We should regard the perturbations of the mind," says Spinoza, "not in the light of vices of human nature, but as properties just as pertinent to it as are heat, storms, thunder, and the like to the nature of the atmosphere, which phenomena, though inconvenient, are yet necessary, and have fixed causes by means of which we endeavour to understand their nature, and the mind has just as much pleasure in seeing them aright as in knowing such things as flatter the senses." Let me have the phenomena which are inconvenient as well as the things which flatter the senses, and the chances are that my life will be

a healthier and happier one than that of the person who spends his time on a cloud blushing at nature's naughtiness.

It is often said that an ideal state—an Utopia where there is no folly, crime, or sorrow—has a singular fascination for the mind. Now, when I meet with a falsehood, I care not who the great persons who proclaim it may be, I do not try to like it or believe it or mimic the fashionable prattle of the world about it. I hate all dreams of perpetual peace, all wonderful cities of the sun, where people consume their joyless monotonous years in mystic contemplations, or find their delight like Buddhist monks in gazing on the ashes of dead generations of devotees. The state is one unnatural, unspeakably repugnant: the dreamless sleep of the grave is more tolerable to the active, healthy mind than such an existence. If Signor Gaudentio di Lucca, still keeping himself alive by means of his marvellous knowledge of the secrets of nature, were to appear before me now on this mountain to inform me that the sacred community he resided with in Central Africa was no mere dream, and should offer to conduct me to it, I should decline to go with him. I should prefer to remain in the Banda Orientál, even though by so doing I should grow at last to be as bad as any person in it, and ready to "wade through slaughter" to the Presidential Chair. For even in my own country of England, which is not so perfect as old Peru or the Pophar's country in Central Africa, I have been long divided from nature, and now in this Oriental country, whose political misdeeds are a scandal alike to

pure England and impure Brazil, I have been reunited to her. For this reason I love her with all her faults. Here, like Santa Coloma, I will kneel down and kiss this stone as an infant might kiss the breast that feeds it; here, fearless of dirt like John Carrickfergus, I will thrust my hands into the loose brown soil to clasp the hands, as it were, of dear mother Nature after our long separation.

Farewell, beautiful land of sunshine and storm, of virtue and of crime; may the invaders of the future fare on your soil like those of the past and leave you in the end to your own devices; may the chivalrous instinct of Santa Coloma, the passion of Dolores, the loving-kindness of Candelaria still live in your children to brighten their lives with romance and beauty; may the blight of our superior civilisation never fall on your wild flowers, or the yoke of our progress be laid on your herdsman—careless, graceful, music-loving as the birds—to make him like the sullen abject peasant of the Old World!

CHAPTER XXIX

BACK TO BUENOS AYRES

THE meeting of my fellow-travellers took place next day on board the ship, where we three were the only cabin passengers. On going down into the little saloon I found Demetria waiting for us, considerably improved in appearance by her new dress, but looking pale and anxious, for she probably found this meeting a trying one. The two women looked earnestly at each other, but Demetria, to hide her nervousness, I suppose, had framed her face in the old, impassive, almost cold expression it had worn when I first knew her, and Paquíta was repelled by it; so after a somewhat lukewarm greeting they sat down and made commonplace remarks. Two women more unlike each other in appearance, character, education, and disposition it would have been difficult to find; still I had hoped they might be friends, and felt keenly disappointed at the result of their first meeting. After an uncomfortable interval we all rose. I was about to proceed to the deck, they to their respective cabins, when Paquíta, without any warning of what was coming suddenly burst into tears and threw her arms about Demetria's neck.

"Oh, dear Demetria, what a sad life yours has been!" she exclaimed.

That was like her, so impulsive and with such a true instinct to make her do the right thing always! The other gladly responded to the embrace, and I hastily retreated, leaving them kissing and mingling their tears.

When I got out on deck I found that we were already on our way, sails up, and a fresh wind sending us swiftly through the dull green water. There were five steerage passengers, disreputable-looking fellows in ponchos and slouch hats, lounging about the deck smoking; but when we got outside the harbour and the ship began to toss a little, they very soon dropped their cigars and began ignominiously creeping away out of sight of the grinning sailors. Only one remained, a grizzly-bearded, rough-looking old gaucho, who firmly kept his seat at the stern, as if determined to see the last of "The Mount," as the pretty city near the foot of Magellan's Hill is called by the English people in this region.

To satisfy myself that none of these fellows were sent in pursuit of Demetria, I asked our Italian captain who they were and how long they had been on board, and was much relieved to hear that they were fugitives—rebels probably—and had all been concealed for the past three or four days in the ship, waiting to get away from Montevideo.

Towards evening it came on very rough, the wind veering round to the south and blowing half a gale, a very favourable wind, as it happened, to take us across this unlovely "Silver Sea," as the poets of the Plata insist on calling it, with its villainous, brick-red, chopping waves, so disagreeable to bad sailors. Paquíta and

Demetria suffered agonies, so that I was obliged to keep with them a good deal. I very imprudently told them not to be alarmed, that it was nothing—*only sea-sickness*—and I verily believe they both hated me with all their hearts for a little while in consequence. Fortunately I had anticipated these harrowing scenes, and had provided a bottle of champagne for the occasion; and after I had consumed two or three glassfuls to encourage them, showing how easy this kind of medicine is to take, I prevailed on them to drink the remainder. At length, about ten o'clock in the evening, they began to suspect that their malady was not going to prove fatal, and seeing them so much better, I went up to get some fresh air. There at the stern still sat the stoical old gaucho looking extremely miserable.

"Good evening, old comrade," said I, "will you smoke a cigar?"

"Young master, you seem to have a good heart," he returned, shaking his head at the proffered cigar, "do, for God's sake, get me a little rum. I am dying for something to warm my inside and stop my head from going round like a top, but nothing can I get from these jabbering foreign brutes on board."

"Yes, why not, my old friend," said I, and going to the master of the boat, I succeeded in getting a pint of rum in a bottle.

The old fellow clutched it with eager delight and took a long draught. "Ah!" he said, patting first the bottle, then his stomach, "this puts new life into a man! Will this voyage never end, master? When I am on horse-

back I can forget that I am old, but these cursed waves remind me that I have lived many years."

I lit my cigar and sat down to have a talk with him.

"Ah, with you foreigners it is just the same—land or water," he continued. "You can even smoke—what a calm head and quiet stomach you must have! But what puzzles me is this, señor; how you, a foreigner, come to be travelling with native women. Now there is that beautiful young señora with the violet eyes, who can she be?"

"She is my wife, old man," said I, laughing, a little amused at his curiosity.

"Ah, you are married then—so young? She is beautiful, graceful, well educated, the daughter of wealthy parents, no doubt, but frail, frail, señor; and some day, not a very distant day—but why should I predict sorrow to a gay heart? Only her face, señor, is strange to me; it does not recall the features of any Oriental family I know."

"That is easily explained," I said, surprised at his shrewdness, "she is an Argentine, not an Oriental."

"Ah, that explains it," he said, taking another long pull at the bottle. "As for the other señora with you, I need not ask you who *she* is."

"Why, who is she?" I returned.

"A Peralta, if there ever was one," he returned confidently.

His reply disturbed me not a little, for after all my precautions this old man had perhaps been sent to follow Demetria.

"Yes," he continued, with an evident pride in his

knowledge of families and faces which tended to allay my suspicions; "a Peralta and not a Madariaga, nor a Sanchez, nor a Zelaya, nor an Ibarra. Do I not know a Peralta when I see one?" And here he laughed scornfully at the absurdity of such an idea.

"Tell me," I said, "how do you know a Peralta?"

"The question!" he exclaimed. "You are a French man or a German from over the sea, and do not understand these things. Have I borne arms forty years in my country's service not to know a Peralta! On earth they are with me; if I go to heaven I meet them there, and in hell I see them; for when have I charged into the hottest of the fight and have not found a Peralta there before me? But I am speaking of the past, señor; for now I am also like one that has been left on the field forgotten —left for the vultures and foxes. You will no longer find them walking on the earth; only where men have rushed together sword in hand you will find their bones. Ah, friend!" And here, overcome with sad memories, the ancient warrior took another drink from his bottle.

"They cannot all be dead," said I, "if, as you imagine, the señora travelling with me is a Peralta."

"As I imagine!" he repeated scornfully. "Do I not know what I am talking about, young sir? They are dead, I tell you—dead as the past, dead as Oriental independence and honour. Did I not ride into the fight at Gil de los Medanos with the last of the Peraltas, Calixto, when he received his baptism of blood? Fifteen years old, señor, only fifteen, when he galloped into the fight, for he had the light heart, the brave spirit, and the hand

swift to strike of a Peralta. And after the fight our colonel, Santa Coloma, who was killed the other day at San Paulo, embraced the boy before all the troops. He is dead, señor, and with Calixto died the house of Peralta."

"You knew Santa Coloma, then?" I said. "But you are mistaken, he was not killed at San Paulo, he made his escape."

"So they say—the ignorant ones," he returned. "But he is dead, for he loved his country, and all who are of that mind are slain. How should he escape?"

"I tell you he is not dead," I repeated, vexed at his stubborn persistence. "I also knew him, old man, and was with him at San Paulo."

He looked at me for a long time, and then took another swig from his bottle.

"Señor, this is not a thing I love joking about," said he. "Let us talk of other things. What I want to know is, what is Calixto's sister doing here? Why has she left her country?"

Receiving no reply to this question he went on: "Has she not got property? Yes, a large estancia, impoverished, ruined, if you like, but still a very large tract of land. When your enemies do not fear you then they cease to persecute. A broken old man, bereft of reason—surely they would not trouble him! No, no, she is leaving her country for other reasons. Yes, there is some private plot against her; some design, perhaps, to carry her off, or even to destroy her and get possession of her property. Naturally in such a case she would fly for protection to

Buenos Ayres, where there is one with some of her blood in his veins able to protect her person and her property."

I was astonished to hear him, but his last words were a mystery to me.

"There is no one in Buenos Ayres to protect her," I said; "I only will be there as I am here to shield her, and if, as you think, she has an enemy, he must reckon with me —one who, like that Calixto you speak of, has a hand quick to strike."

"There spoke the heart of a Blanco!" he exclaimed, clutching my arm, and then, the boat giving a lurch at that moment, almost dragging me down in his efforts to steady himself. After another sip of rum he went on: "But who are you, young sir, if that is not an impertinent question? Do you possess money, influence, powerful friends, that you take upon yourself the care of this woman? Is it in your power to baffle and crush her enemy or enemies, to protect not only her person, but her property, which, in her absence, will become the prey of robbers?"

"And who are you, old man?" I returned, unable to give a satisfactory answer to one of his searching questions, "and why do you ask me these things? And who is this powerful person you speak of in Buenos Ayres with some of her blood in his veins, but of whose existence she is ignorant?"

He shook his head silently, then deliberately proceeded to take out and light a cigarette. He smoked with a placid enjoyment which made me think that his refusal of my cigar and his bitter complaints about the effects of the

ship's tossing on him had merely been to get the bottle of rum out of me. He was evidently a veteran in more senses than one, and now finding that I would tell him no more secrets he refused to answer any questions. Fearing that I had imprudently told him too much already, I finally left him and retired to my bunk.

Next morning we arrived at Buenos Ayres, and cast anchor about two miles from shore, for that was as near the land as we could get. Presently we were boarded by a Custom House officer, and for some time longer I was engaged in getting out our luggage and in bargaining with the captain to put us on shore. When I had completed these arrangements I was very much surprised to see the cunning old soldier I had talked with the evening before sitting in the Custom House boat which was just putting off from the side. Demetria had been looking on when the old fellow had left the ship, and she now came to me looking very excited.

"Richard," she said, "did you notice that man who was a passenger with us and who has just gone off in the boat? It is Santa Coloma."

"Oh, absurd!" I exclaimed. "I talked with that old man last night for an hour—an old grey-bearded gaucho, and no more like Santa Coloma than that sailor."

"I know I am right," she returned. "The General has visited my father at the estancia and I know him well. He is disguised now and has made himself look like a peasant, but when he went over the side into the boat he looked full into my face; I knew him and started, then he smiled, for he saw that I had recognised him."

The very fact that this common-looking old man had gone on shore in the Custom House boat proved that he was a person of consequence in disguise, and I could not doubt that Demetria was right. I felt excessively annoyed at myself for having failed to penetrate his disguise; for something of the old Marcos Marcó style of speaking might very well have revealed his identity if I had only had my wits about me. I was also very much concerned on Demetria's account, for it seemed that I had missed finding out something for her which would have been to her advantage to know. I was ashamed to tell her of that conversation about a relation in Buenos Ayres, but secretly determined to try and find Santa Coloma to get him to tell me what he knew.

After landing we put our small luggage into a fly and were driven to an hotel in Calle Lima, an out-of-the-way place kept by a German; but I knew the house to be a quiet, respectable one and very moderate in its charges.

About five o'clock in the afternoon we were together in the sitting-room on the first floor looking down on the street from the window, when a well-appointed carriage with a gentleman and two young ladies in it drew up before the door.

"Oh, Richard," exclaimed Paquíta in the greatest excitement, "it is Don Pantaleon Villaverde with his daughters, and they are getting out!"

"Who is Villaverde?" I asked.

"What, do you not know? He is a Judge of First Instance and his daughters are my dearest friends. Is it not strange to meet them like this? Oh, I must see

them to ask for papa and mamita!" and here she began to cry.

The waiter came up with a card from the Señor Villaverde requesting an interview with the Señorita Peralta.

Demetria, who had been trying to soothe Paquíta's intense excitement and infuse a little courage into her, was too much amazed to speak; and in another moment our visitors were in the room. Paquíta started up tearful and trembling; then her two young friends, after staring at her for a few moments, delivered a screech of astonishment and rushed into her arms, and all three were locked together for some time in a triangular embrace.

When the excitement of this tempestuous meeting had spent itself, Señor Villaverde, who stood looking on with grave, impassive face, spoke to Demetria, telling her that his old friend, General Santa Coloma, had just informed him of her arrival in Buenos Ayres and of the hotel where she was staying. Probably she did not even know who he was, he said; he was her relation; his mother was a Peralta, a first cousin of her unhappy father, Colonel Peralta. He had come to see her with his daughters to invite her to make his house her home during her stay in Buenos Ayres. He also wished to help her with her affairs, which, his friend the General had informed him, were in some confusion. He had, he concluded, many influential friends in the sister city, who would be ready to assist him in arranging matters for her.

Demetria, recovering from the nervousness she had experienced on finding that Paquíta's great friends were

her visitors, thanked him warmly and accepted his offer of a home and assistance; then, with a quiet dignity and self-possession one would hardly expect from a girl coming amongst fashionable people for the first time in her life, she greeted her new-found relations and thanked them for their visit.

As they insisted on taking Demetria away with them at once she left us to make her preparations, while Paquíta remained conversing with her friends, having many questions to ask them. She was consumed with anxiety to know how her family, and especially her father, who made the domestic laws, now, after so many months, regarded her elopement and marriage with me. Her friends, however, either knew nothing or would not tell her what they knew.

Poor Demetria! she had, with no time given her for reflection, taken the wise course of at once accepting the offer of her influential and extremely dignified kinsman: but it was hard for her to leave her friends at such short notice, and when she came back prepared for her departure the separation tried her severely. With tears in her eyes she bade Paquíta farewell, but when she took my hand in hers, for some time her trembling lips refused to speak. Overcoming her emotions by a great effort, she at length said, addressing her visitors, "For my escape from a sad and perilous position and for the pleasure of finding myself here amongst relations, I am indebted to this young friend who has been a brother to me."

Señor Villaverde listened and bowed towards me, but

with no softening in his stern, calm face, while his cold grey eyes seemed to look straight through me at something beyond. His manner towards me made me feel a kind of despair, for how strong must have been his disapproval of my conduct in running off with his friend's daughter—how great his indignation against me, when it prevented him from bestowing one smile or one kind word on me to thank me for all I had done for his kinswoman! Yet this was only the reflected indignation of my father-in-law.

We went down to the carriage to see them off, and then finding myself for a moment by the side of one of the young ladies I tried to find out something for myself. "Pray tell me, señorita," I said, "what you know about my father-in-law. If it is very bad, I promise you my wife shall not hear a word of it; but it is best that I should know the truth before meeting him."

A cloud came over her bright, expressive face while she glanced anxiously at Paquíta; then bending towards me she whispered, "Ah, my friend, he is implacable! I am so sorry for Paquíta's sake." And then with a smile of irrepressible coquetry she added, "And for yours."

The carriage drove away, and Demetria's eyes looking back at me were filled with tears, but in Señor Villaverde's eyes, also glancing back, there was an expression that boded ill for my future. His feeling was natural, perhaps, for he was the father of two very pretty girls.

Implacable, and I was now divided from him by no silver or brick-coloured sea! By returning I had made myself amenable to the laws I had broken by marrying

a girl under age without her father's consent. The person in England who runs away with a ward in Chancery is not a greater offender against the law than I was. It was now in his power to have me punished, to cast me into prison for an indefinite time, and if not to crush my spirit, he would at least be able to break the heart of his unhappy daughter. Those wild, troubled days in the Purple Land now seemed to my mind peaceful, happy days, and the bitter days with no pleasure in them were only now about to begin. Implacable!

Suddenly looking up, I found Paquita's violet eyes full of sad questioning fixed on my face.

"Tell me truly, Richard, what have you heard?" she asked.

I forced a smile, and taking her hand assured her that I had heard nothing to cause her any uneasiness. "Come," I said, "let us go in and prepare to leave town to-morrow. We will go back to the point we started from—your father's estancia, for the sooner this meeting you are thinking about so anxiously is over the better will it be for all of us."

APPENDIX

HISTORY OF THE BANDA ORIENTÁL

THE country, called in this work the Purple Land, was discovered by Magellan in the year 1500, and he called the hill, or mountain, which gives its name to the capital, Monte Vidi. He described it as a hat-shaped mountain; and it is probable that, four centuries ago, the tall conical hat, which is worn to this day by women in South Wales, was a common form in Spain and Portugal.

In due time settlements were made; but the colonists of those days loved gold and adventure above everything, and finding neither in the Banda, they little esteemed it. For two centuries it was neglected by its white possessors, while the cattle they had imported continued to multiply, and returning to a feral life, overran the country in amazing numbers.

The heroic period in South American history then passed away. El Dorado, the Spaniard's New Jerusalem, has changed into a bank of malarious mist and a cloud of mosquitoes. Amazons, giants, pigmies,

> "The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders,"

when closely looked for, turned out to be Red Indians of a type which varied but little throughout the entire vast continent. Wanderers from the Old World grew weary of seeking the

tropics only to sink into flowery graves. They turned away sick at heart from the great desolation where the splendid empire of the Children of the Sun had so lately flourished. The accumulated treasures had been squandered. The cruel crusades of the Paulists against the Jesuit missions had ceased, for the inhuman slave-hunters had utterly destroyed the smiling gardens in the wilderness. A remnant of the escaped converts had gone back to a wild life in the woods, and the Fathers, who had done their Master's work so well, drifted away to mingle in other scenes or die of broken hearts. Then, in the sober eighteenth century, when the disillusion was complete, Spain woke up to the fact that in the temperate part of the continent, shared by her with Portugal, she possessed a new bright little Spain worth cultivating. About the same time Portugal discovered that the acquisition of this pretty country, with its lovely Lusitanian climate, would nicely round off her vast possessions on the south side. Forthwith these two great colonising powers fell to fighting over the Banda, where there were no temples of beaten gold, or mythical races of men, or fountains of everlasting youth. The quarrel might have continued to the end of time, so languidly was it conducted by both parties, had not great events come to swallow up the little ones.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the English invasion burst like a sudden terrible thunderstorm on the country. Montevideo on the east and Buenos Ayres on the west side of the sea-like river were captured and lost again. The storm was soon over, but it had the effect of precipitating the revolution of 1810, which presently ended in the loss to Spain of all her American possessions. These changes brought only fresh wars and calamities to the long-suffering Banda. The ancient feud between Spain and Portugal descended to the new Brazilian Empire and the

new Argentine Confederation, and these claimants contended for the country until 1828, when they finally agreed to let it govern itself in its own fashion. After thus acquiring its independence the little Belgium of the New World cast off its pretty but hated appellation of Cisplatina and resumed its old joyous name of Banda Orientál. With light hearts the people then proceeded to divide themselves into two political parties—Whites and Reds. Endless struggles for mastery ensued, in which the Argentines and Brazilians, forgetting their solemn compact, were for ever taking sides. But of these wars of crows and pies it would be idle to say more, since after going on for three-quarters of a century they are not wholly ended yet. The rambles and adventures described in the book take us back to the late sixties or early seventies of the last century, when the country was still in the condition in which it had remained since the colonial days, when the ten years' siege of Montevideo was not yet a remote event, and many of the people one met had had a part in it.

GREEN MANSIONS

A Romance of The Tropical Forest

PROLOGUE

IT is a cause of very great regret to me that this task has taken so much longer a time than I had expected for its completion. It is now many months—over a year, in fact—since I wrote to Georgetown announcing my intention of publishing, *in a very few months*, the whole truth about Mr. Abel. Hardly less could have been looked for from his nearest friend, and I had hoped that the discussion in the newspapers would have ceased, at all events, until the appearance of the promised book. It has not been so; and at this distance from Guiana I was not aware of how much conjectural matter was being printed week by week in the local press, some of which must have been painful reading to Mr. Abel's friends. A darkened chamber, the existence of which had never been suspected in that familiar house in Main Street, furnished only with an ebony stand on which stood a cinerary urn, its surface ornamented with flower and leaf and thorn, and winding through it all the figure of a serpent; an inscription, too, of seven short words which no one could understand or

rightly interpret; and finally, the disposal of the mysterious ashes—that was all there was relating to an untold chapter in a man's life for imagination to work on. Let us hope that now, at last, the romance-weaving will come to an end. It was, however, but natural that the keenest curiosity should have been excited; not only because of that peculiar and indescribable charm of the man, which all recognised and which won all hearts, but also because of that hidden chapter—that sojourn in the desert, about which he preserved silence. It was felt in a vague way by his intimates that he had met with unusual experiences which had profoundly affected him and changed the course of his life. To me alone was the truth known, and I must now tell, briefly as possible, how my great friendship and close intimacy with him came about.

When, in 1887, I arrived in Georgetown to take up an appointment in a public office, I found Mr. Abel an old resident there, a man of means and a favourite in society. Yet he was an alien, a Venezuelan, one of that turbulent people on our border whom the colonists have always looked on as their natural enemies. The story told to me was that about twelve years before that time he had arrived at Georgetown from some remote district in the interior; that he had journeyed alone on foot across half the continent to the coast, and had first appeared among them, a young stranger, penniless, in rags, wasted almost to a skeleton by fever and misery of all kinds, his face blackened by long exposure to sun and wind. Friendless, with but little English, it was a hard struggle for him to live; but he managed somehow, and eventually letters

from Caracas informed him that a considerable property of which he had been deprived was once more his own, and he was also invited to return to his country to take his part in the government of the republic. But Mr. Abel, though young, had already outlived political passions and aspirations, and, apparently, even the love of his country; at all events, he elected to stay where he was—his enemies, he would say smilingly, were his best friends—and one of the first uses he made of his fortune was to buy that house in Main Street which was afterwards like a home to me.

I must state here that my friend's full name was Abel Guevez de Argensola, but in his early days in Georgetown he was called by his christian name only, and later he wished to be known simply as "Mr. Abel."

I had no sooner made his acquaintance than I ceased to wonder at the esteem and even affection with which he, a Venezuelan, was regarded in this British colony. All knew and liked him, and the reason of it was the personal charm of the man, his kindly disposition, his manner with women, which pleased them and excited no man's jealousy—not even the old hot-tempered planter's, with a very young and pretty and light-headed wife—his love of little children, of all wild creatures, of nature, and of whatsoever was furthest removed from the common material interests and concerns of a purely commercial community. The things which excited other men—politics, sport, and the price of crystals—were outside of his thoughts; and when men had done with them for a season, when like the tempest they had "blown their fill" in office and club-room and house and wanted a change, it

was a relief to turn to Mr. Abel and get him to discourse of *his* world—the world of nature and of the spirit.

It was, all felt, a good thing to have a Mr. Abel in Georgetown. That it was indeed good for me I quickly discovered. I had certainly not expected to meet in such a place with any person to share my tastes—that love of poetry which has been the chief passion and delight of my life; but such an one I had found in Mr. Abel. It surprised me that he, suckled on the literature of Spain, and a reader of only ten or twelve years of English literature, possessed a knowledge of our modern poetry as intimate as my own, and a love of it equally great. This feeling brought us together, and made us two—the nervous olive-skinned Hispano-American of the tropics and the phlegmatic blue-eyed Saxon of the cold north—one in spirit and more than brothers. Many were the daylight hours we spent together and "tired the sun with talking"; many, past counting, the precious evenings in that restful house of his where I was an almost daily guest. I had not looked for such happiness; nor, he often said, had he. A result of this intimacy was that the vague idea concerning his hidden past, that some unusual experience had profoundly affected him and perhaps changed the whole course of his life, did not diminish, but, on the contrary, became accentuated, and was often in my mind. The change in him was almost painful to witness whenever our wandering talk touched on the subject of the aborigines, and of the knowledge he had acquired of their character and languages when living or travelling among them; all that made his conversation most engaging—the lively, curious mind,

the wit, the gaiety of spirit tinged with a tender melancholy—appeared to fade out of it; even the expression of his face would change, becoming hard and set, and he would deal you out facts in a dry mechanical way as if reading them in a book. It grieved me to note this, but I dropped no hint of such a feeling, and would never have spoken about it but for a quarrel which came at last to make the one brief solitary break in that close friendship of years. I got into a bad state of health, and Abel was not only much concerned about it, but annoyed, as if I had not treated him well by being ill, and he would even say that I could get well if I wished to. I did not take this seriously, but one morning, when calling to see me at the office, he attacked me in a way that made me downright angry with him. He told me that indolence and the use of stimulants was the cause of my bad health. He spoke in a mocking way, with a pretence of not quite meaning it, but the feeling could not be wholly disguised. Stung by his reproaches, I blurted out that he had no right to talk to me, even in fun, in such a way. Yes, he said, getting serious, he had the best right—that of our friendship. He would be no true friend if he kept his peace about such a matter. Then, in my haste, I retorted that to me the friendship between us did not seem so perfect and complete as it did to him. One condition of friendship is that the partners in it should be known to each other. He had had my whole life and mind open to him, to read it as in a book. *His* life was a closed and clasped volume to me.

His face darkened, and after a few moments' silent reflection he got up and left me with a cold good-bye,

and without that hand-grasp which had been customary between us.

After his departure I had the feeling that a great loss, a great calamity, had befallen me, but I was still smarting at his too candid criticism, all the more because in my heart I acknowledged its truth. And that night, lying awake, I repented of the cruel retort I had made, and resolved to ask his forgiveness and leave it to him to determine the question of our future relations. But he was beforehand with me, and with the morning came a letter begging my forgiveness and asking me to go that evening to dine with him.

We were alone, and during dinner and afterwards, when we sat smoking and sipping black coffee in the verandah, we were unusually quiet, even to gravity, which caused the two white-clad servants that waited on us—the brown-faced subtle-eyed old Hindoo butler and an almost blue-black young Guiana negro—to direct many furtive glances at their master's face. They were accustomed to see him in a more genial mood when he had a friend to dine. To me the change in his manner was not surprising: from the moment of seeing him I had divined that he had determined to open the shut and clasped volume of which I had spoken—that the time had now come for him to speak.

CHAPTER I

NOW that we are cool, he said, and regret that we hurt each other, I am not sorry that it happened. I deserved your reproach: a hundred times I have wished to tell you the whole story of my travels and adventures among the savages, and one of the reasons which prevented me was the fear that it would have an unfortunate effect on our friendship. That was precious, and I desired above everything to keep it. But I must think no more about that now. I must think only of how I am to tell you my story. I will begin at a time when I was twenty-three. It was early in life to be in the thick of politics, and in trouble to the extent of having to fly my country to save my liberty, perhaps my life.

Every nation, someone remarks, has the government it deserves, and Venezuela certainly has the one it deserves and that suits it best. We call it a republic, not only because it is not one, but also because a thing must have a name; and to have a good name, or a fine name, is very convenient—especially when you want to borrow money. If the Venezuelans, thinly distributed over an area of half a million square miles, mostly illiterate peasants, half-breeds, and indigenes, were educated, intelligent men, zealous only for the public weal, it would be possible for

them to have a real republic. They have instead a government by cliques, tempered by revolution; and a very good government it is, in harmony with the physical conditions of the country and the national temperament. Now it happens that the educated men, representing your higher classes, are so few that there are not many persons unconnected by ties of blood or marriage with prominent members of the political groups to which they belong. By this you will see how easy and almost inevitable it is that we should become accustomed to look on conspiracy and revolt against the regnant party—the men of another clique—as only in the natural order of things. In the event of failure such outbreaks are punished, but they are not regarded as immoral. On the contrary, men of the highest intelligence and virtue among us are seen taking a leading part in these adventures. Whether such a condition of things is intrinsically wrong or not, or would be wrong in some circumstances and is not wrong, because inevitable, in others, I cannot pretend to decide; and all this tiresome prolusion is only to enable you to understand how I—a young man of unblemished character, not a soldier by profession, not ambitious of political distinction, wealthy for that country, popular in society, a lover of social pleasures, of books, of nature—actuated, as I believed, by the highest motives, allowed myself to be drawn very readily by friends and relations into a conspiracy to overthrow the government of the moment, with the object of replacing it by more worthy men—ourselves, to wit.

Our adventure failed because the authorities got wind

of the affair and matters were precipitated. Our leaders at the moment happened to be scattered over the country —some were abroad; and a few hot-headed men of the party, who were in Caracas just then, and probably feared arrest, struck a rash blow: the President was attacked in the street and wounded. But the attackers were seized, and some of them shot on the following day. When the news reached me I was at a distance from the capital, staying with a friend on an estate he owned on the River Quebrada Honda, in the State of Guarico, some fifteen to twenty miles from the town of Zaraza. My friend, an officer in the army, was a leader in the conspiracy; and as I was the only son of a man who had been greatly hated by the Minister of War, it became necessary for us both to fly for our lives. In the circumstances we could not look to be pardoned, even on the score of youth.

Our first decision was to escape to the sea-coast; but as the risk of a journey to La Guayra, or any other port of embarkation on the north side of the country, seemed too great, we made our way in a contrary direction to the Orinoco, and downstream to Angostura. Now, when we had reached this comparatively safe breathing-place—safe, at all events, for the moment—I changed my mind about leaving or attempting to leave the country. Since boyhood I had taken a very peculiar interest in that vast and almost unexplored territory we possess south of the Orinoco, with its countless unmapped rivers and trackless forests; and in its savage inhabitants, with their ancient customs and character, unadulterated by contact with Europeans. To visit this primitive wilderness had been a

cherished dream; and I had to some extent even prepared myself for such an adventure by mastering more than one of the Indian dialects of the northern states of Venezuela. And now, finding myself on the south side of our great river, with unlimited time at my disposal, I determined to gratify this wish. My companion took his departure towards the coast, while I set about making preparations and hunting up information from those who had travelled in the interior to trade with the savages. I decided eventually to go back upstream, and penetrate to the interior in the western part of Guayana, and the Amazonian territory bordering on Colombia and Brazil, and to return to Angostura in about six months' time. I had no fear of being arrested in the semi-independent, and in most part savage region, as the Guayana authorities concerned themselves little enough about the political upheavals at Caracas.

The first five or six months I spent in Guayana, after leaving the city of refuge, were eventful enough to satisfy a moderately adventurous spirit. A complaisant Government employé at Angostura had provided me with a passport, in which it was set down (for few to read) that my object in visiting the interior was to collect information concerning the native tribes, the vegetable products of the country, and other knowledge which would be of advantage to the Republic; and the authorities were requested to afford me protection and assist me in my pursuits.

I ascended the Orinoco, making occasional expeditions to the small Christian settlements in the neighbourhood

of the right bank, also to the Indian villages; and travelling in this way, seeing and learning much, in about three months I reached the River Meta. During this period I amused myself by keeping a journal, a record of personal adventures, impressions of the country and people, both semi-civilised and savage; and as my journal grew, I began to think that on my return at some future time to Caracas, it might prove useful and interesting to the public, and also procure me fame; which thought proved pleasurable and a great incentive, so that I began to observe things more narrowly and to study expression. But the book was not to be.

From the mouth of the Meta I journeyed on, intending to visit the settlement of Atahapo, where the great River Guaviare, with other rivers, empty themselves into the Orinoco. But I was not destined to reach it, for at the small settlement of Manapuri I fell ill of a low fever; and here ended the first half-year of my wanderings, about which no more need be told.

A more miserable place than Manapuri for a man to be ill of a low fever in could not well be imagined. The settlement, composed of mean hovels, with a few large structures of mud, or plastered wattle, thatched with palm leaves, was surrounded by water, marsh, and forest, the breeding-place of myriads of croaking frogs and of clouds of mosquitoes; even to one in perfect health existence in such a place would have been a burden. The inhabitants mustered about eighty or ninety, mostly Indians of that degenerate class frequently to be met with in small trading outposts. The savages of Guayana are great drinkers,

but not drunkards in our sense, since their fermented liquors contain so little alcohol that inordinate quantities must be swallowed to produce intoxication; in the settlements they prefer the white man's more potent poisons, with the result that in a small place like Manapuri one can see enacted, as on a stage, the last act in the great American tragedy. To be succeeded, doubtless, by other and possibly greater tragedies. My thoughts at that period of suffering were pessimistic in the extreme. Sometimes, when the almost continuous rain held up for half a day, I would manage to creep out a short distance; but I was almost past making any exertion, scarcely caring to live, and taking absolutely no interest in the news from Caracas, which reached me at long intervals. At the end of two months, feeling a slight improvement in my health, and with it a returning interest in life and its affairs, it occurred to me to get out my diary and write a brief account of my sojourn at Manapuri. I had placed it for safety in a small deal box, lent to me for the purpose by a Venezuelan trader, an old resident at the settlement, by name Pantaleon—called by all Don Panta—one who openly kept half a dozen Indian wives in his house, and was noted for his dishonesty and greed, but who had proved himself a good friend to me. The box was in a corner of the wretched palm-thatched hovel I inhabited; but on taking it out I discovered that for several weeks the rain had been dripping on it, and that the manuscript was reduced to a sodden pulp. I flung it upon the floor with a curse, and threw myself back on my bed with a groan.

In that desponding state I was found by my friend

Panta, who was constant in his visits at all hours; and, when in answer to his anxious inquiries I pointed to the pulpy mass on the mud floor, he turned it over with his foot, and then, bursting into a loud laugh, kicked it out, remarking that he had mistaken the object for some unknown reptile that had crawled in out of the rain. He affected to be astonished that I should regret its loss. It was all a true narrative, he exclaimed; if I wished to write a book for the stay-at-homes to read, I could easily invent a thousand lies far more entertaining than any real experiences. He had come to me, he said, to propose something. He had lived twenty years at that place, and had got accustomed to the climate, but it would not do for me to remain any longer if I wished to live. I must go away at once to a different country—to the mountains, where it was open and dry. "And if you want quinine when you are there," he concluded, "smell the wind when it blows from the south-west, and you will inhale it into your system, fresh from the forest." When I remarked despondingly that in my condition it would be impossible to quit Manapuri, he went on to say that a small party of Indians was now in the settlement; that they had come, not only to trade, but to visit one of their own tribe, who was his wife, purchased some years ago from her father. "And the money she cost me I have never regretted to this day," said he, "for she is a good wife—not jealous," he added, with a curse on all the others. These Indians came all the way from the Queneveta mountains, and were of the Maquiritari tribe. He, Panta, and, better still, his good wife, would interest them on my behalf, and for a

suitable reward they would take me by slow, easy stages to their own country, where I would be treated well and recover my health.

This proposal, after I had considered it well, produced so good an effect on me, that I not only gave a glad consent, but, on the following day, I was able to get about and begin the preparations for my journey with some spirit.

In about eight days I bade good-bye to my generous friend Panta, whom I regarded, after having seen much of him, as a kind of savage beast that had sprung on me, not to rend, but to rescue from death; for we know that even cruel savage brutes and evil men have at times sweet, beneficent impulses, during which they act in a way contrary to their natures, like passive agents of some higher power. It was a continual pain to travel in my weak condition, and the patience of my Indians was severely taxed; but they did not forsake me; and, at last, the entire distance, which I conjectured to be about sixty-five leagues, was accomplished; and at the end I was actually stronger and better in every way than at the start. From this time my progress towards complete recovery was rapid. The air, with or without any medicinal virtue blown from the cinchona trees in the far-off Andean forest, was tonic; and when I took my walks on the hill-side above the Indian village, or later, when able to climb to the summits, the world as seen from those wild Queneveta mountains had a largeness and varied glory of scenery peculiarly refreshing and delightful to the soul.

With the Maquiritari tribe I passed some weeks, and

the sweet sensations of returning health made me happy for a time; but such sensations seldom outlast convalescence. I was no sooner well again than I began to feel a restless spirit stirring in me. The monotony of savage life in this place became intolerable. After my long listless period the reaction had come, and I wished only for action, adventure—no matter how dangerous; and for new scenes, new faces, new dialects. In the end I conceived the idea of going on to the Casiquiare river, where I would find a few small settlements, and perhaps obtain help from the authorities there which would enable me to reach the Rio Negro. For it was now in my mind to follow that river to the Amazons, and so down to Para and the Atlantic coast.

Leaving the Queneveta range, I started with two of the Indians as guides and travelling companions; but their journey ended only half-way to the river I wished to reach; and they left me with some friendly savages living on the Chunapay, a tributary of the Cunucumana, which flows to the Orinoco. Here I had no choice but to wait until an opportunity of attaching myself to some party of travelling Indians, going south-west, should arrive; for by this time I had expended the whole of my small capital in ornaments and calico brought from Manapuri, so that I could no longer purchase any man's service. And perhaps it will be as well to state at this point just what I possessed. For some time I had worn nothing but sandals to protect my feet; my garments consisted of a single suit, and one flannel shirt, which I washed frequently, going shirtless while it was drying. Fortu-

aately I had an excellent blue cloth cloak, durable and handsome, given to me by a friend at Angostura, whose prophecy on presenting it, that it would outlast *me*, very nearly came true. It served as a covering by night, and to keep a man warm and comfortable when travelling in cold and wet weather no better garment was ever made. I had a revolver and metal cartridge box in my broad leather belt, also a good hunting-knife with strong buckhorn handle and a heavy blade about nine inches long. In the pocket of my cloak I had a pretty silver tinder-box, and a match-box—to be mentioned again in this narrative—and one or two other trifling objects: these I was determined to keep until they could be kept no longer.

During the tedious interval of waiting on the Chunapay I was told a flattering tale by the village Indians, which eventually caused me to abandon the proposed journey to the Rio Negro. These Indians wore necklets, like nearly all the Guayana savages; but one, I observed, possessed a necklet unlike that of the others, which greatly aroused my curiosity. It was made of thirteen gold plates, irregular in form, about as broad as a man's thumb-nail, and linked together with fibres. I was allowed to examine it, and had no doubt that the pieces were of pure gold, beaten flat by the savages. When questioned about it they said that it was originally obtained from the Indians of Parahuari, and Parahuari, they further said, was a mountainous country west of the Orinoco. Every man and woman in that place, they assured me, had such a necklet. This report inflamed my

mind to such a degree that I could not rest by night or day for dreaming golden dreams, and considering how to get to that rich district, unknown to civilised men. The Indians gravely shook their heads when I tried to persuade them to take me. They were far enough from the Orinoco, and Parahuari was ten, perhaps fifteen, days' journey further on—a country unknown to them, where they had no relations.

In spite of difficulties and delays, however, and not without pain and some perilous adventures, I succeeded at last in reaching the upper Orinoco, and, eventually, in crossing to the other side. With my life in my hand I struggled on westward through an unknown difficult country, from Indian village to village, where at any moment I might have been murdered with impunity for the sake of my few belongings. It is hard for me to speak a good word for the Guayana savages; but I must now say this of them, that they not only did me no harm when I was at their mercy during this long journey, but they gave me shelter in their villages, and fed me when I was hungry, and helped me on my way when I could make no return. You must not, however, run away with the idea that there is any sweetness in their disposition, any humane or benevolent instincts such as are found among the civilised nations: far from it. I regard them now, and, fortunately for me, I regarded them then, when, as I have said, I was at their mercy, as beasts of prey, plus a cunning or low kind of intelligence vastly greater than that of the brute; and, for only morality, that respect for the rights of other members of the same family, or tribe, without which even

the rudest communities cannot hold together. How, then, could I do this thing, and dwell and travel freely, without receiving harm, among tribes that have no peace with and no kindly feelings towards the stranger, in a district where the white man is rarely or never seen? Because I knew them so well. Without that knowledge, always available, and an extreme facility in acquiring new dialects, which had increased by practice until it was almost like intuition, I should have fared badly after leaving the Maquiritari tribe. As it was, I had two or three very narrow escapes.

To return from this digression. I looked at last on the famous Parahuari mountains, which, I was greatly surprised to find, were after all nothing but hills, and not very high ones. This, however, did not depress me. The very fact that Parahuari possessed no imposing feature in its scenery seemed rather to prove that it must be rich in gold: how else could its name and the fame of its treasures be familiar to people dwelling so far away as the Cunucumana?

But there was no gold. I searched through the whole range, which was about seven leagues long, and visited the villages, where I talked much with the Indians, interrogating them, and they had no necklets of gold, nor gold in any form; nor had they ever heard of its presence in Parahuari, nor in any other place known to them.

The very last village where I spoke on the subject of my quest, albeit now without hope, was about a league from the western extremity of the range, in the midst of a high broken country of forest and savannah and many swift streams; near one of these, called the Curicay, the village stood, among low scattered trees—a large building,

in which all the people, numbering eighteen, passed most of their time when not hunting, with two smaller buildings attached to it. The head, or chief, Runi by name, was about fifty years old, a taciturn, finely formed, and somewhat dignified savage, who was either of a sullen disposition or not well pleased at the intrusion of a white man. And for a time I made no attempt to conciliate him. What profit was there in it at all? Even that light mask, which I had worn so long and with such good effect, incommoded me now: I would cast it aside and be myself —silent and sullen as my barbarous host. If any malignant purpose was taking form in his mind, let it, and let him do his worst; for when failure first stares a man in the face it has so dark and repellent a look that not anything that can be added can make him more miserable; nor has he any apprehension. For weeks I had been searching with eager, feverish eyes in every village, in every rocky crevice, in every noisy mountain streamlet, for the glittering yellow dust I had travelled so far to find. And now all my beautiful dreams—all the pleasure and power to be —had vanished like a mere mirage on the savannah at noon.

It was a day of despair which I spent in this place, sitting all day indoors, for it was raining hard, immersed in my own gloomy thoughts, pretending to doze in my seat, and out of the narrow slits of my half-closed eyes seeing the others, also sitting or moving about, like shadows or people in a dream; and I cared nothing about them, and wished not to seem friendly, even for the sake of the food they might offer me by-and-by.

Towards evening the rain ceased; and rising up I went out a short distance to the neighbouring stream, where I sat on a stone, and casting off my sandals, laved my bruised feet in the cool running water. The western half of the sky was blue again with that tender lucid blue seen after rain, but the leaves still glittered with water, and the wet trunks looked almost black under the green foliage. The rare loveliness of the scene touched and lightened my heart. Away back in the east the hills of Parahuari, with the level sun full on them, loomed with a strange glory against the grey rainy clouds drawing off on that side, and their new mystic beauty almost made me forget how these same hills had wearied, and hurt, and mocked me. On that side, also to the north and south, there was open forest, but to the west a different prospect met the eye. Beyond the stream and the strip of verdure that fringed it, and the few scattered dwarf trees growing near its banks, spread a brown savannah sloping upwards to a long, low, rocky ridge, beyond which rose a great solitary hill, or rather mountain, conical in form, and clothed in forest almost to the summit. This was the mountain Ytaioa, the chief landmark in that district. As the sun went down over the ridge, beyond the savannah, the whole western sky changed to a delicate rose-colour that had the appearance of rose-coloured smoke blown there by some far off-wind, and left suspended—a thin, brilliant veil showing through it the distant sky beyond, blue and ethereal. Flocks of birds, a kind of troupial, were flying past me overhead, flock succeeding flock, on their way to their roosting-place, uttering as they flew a

clear, bell-like chirp; and there was something ethereal too in those drops of melodious sound, which fell into my heart like raindrops falling into a pool to mix their fresh heavenly water with the water of earth.

Doubtless into the turbid tarn of my heart some sacred drops had fallen—from the passing birds, from that crimson disc which had now dropped below the horizon, the darkening hills, the rose and blue of infinite heaven, from the whole visible circle; and I felt purified and had a strange sense and apprehension of a secret innocence and spirituality in nature—a prescience of some bourn, incalculably distant perhaps, to which we are all moving; of a time when the heavenly rain shall have washed us clean from all spot and blemish. This unexpected peace which I had found now seemed to me of infinitely greater value than that yellow metal I had missed finding, with all its possibilities. My wish now was to rest for a season at this spot, so remote and lovely and peaceful, where I had experienced such unusual feelings, and such a blessed disillusionment.

This was the end of my second period in Guayana; the first had been filled with that dream of a book to win me fame in my country, perhaps even in Europe: the second, from the time of leaving the Queneveta mountains, with the dream of boundless wealth—the old dream of gold in this region that has drawn so many minds since the days of Alonzo Pizarro. But to remain I must propitiate Runi, sitting silent with gloomy brows over there indoors; and he did not appear to me like one that might be won with words, however flattering. It was clear to me that

the time had come to part with my one remaining valuable trinket—the tinder-box of chased silver.

I returned to the house, and going in seated myself on a log by the fire, just opposite to my grim host, who was smoking and appeared not to have moved since I left him. I made myself a cigarette, then drew out the tinder-box, with its flint and steel attached to it by means of two small silver chains. His eyes brightened a little as they curiously watched my movements, and he pointed without speaking to the glowing coals of fire at my feet. I shook my head, and striking the steel, sent out a brilliant spray of sparks, then blew on the tinder and lit my cigarette. This done, instead of returning the box to my pocket I passed the chain through the buttonhole of my cloak and let it dangle on my breast as an ornament. When the cigarette was smoked I cleared my throat in the orthodox manner, and fixed my eyes on Runi, who, on his part, made a slight movement to indicate that he was ready to listen to what I had to say.

My speech was long, lasting at least half an hour, delivered in a profound silence; it was chiefly occupied with an account of my wanderings in Guayana; and being little more than a catalogue of names of all the places I had visited, and the tribes and chief or head men with whom I had come in contact, I was able to speak continuously, and so to hide my ignorance of a dialect which was still new to me. The Guayana savage judges a man for his staying powers. To stand as motionless as a bronze statue for one or two hours watching for a bird; to sit or lie still for half a day; to endure pain, not seldom self-inflicted, with-

out wincing; and when delivering a speech to pour it out in a copious stream, without pausing to take breath or hesitating over a word—to be able to do all this is to prove yourself a man, an equal, one to be respected and even made a friend of. What I really wished to say to him was put in a few words at the conclusion of my well-nigh meaningless oration. Everywhere, I said, I had been the Indian's friend, and I wished to be his friend, to live with him at Parahuari, even as I had lived with other chiefs and heads of villages and families; to be looked on by him, as these others had looked on me, not as a stranger or a white man, but as a friend, a brother, an Indian.

I ceased speaking, and there was a slight murmurous sound in the room, as of wind long pent up in many lungs suddenly exhaled; while Runi, still unmoved, emitted a low grunt. Then I rose, and detaching the silver ornament from my cloak presented it to him. He accepted it; not very graciously, as a stranger to these people might have imagined; but I was satisfied, feeling sure that I had made a favourable impression. After a little he handed the box to the person sitting next to him, who examined it and passed it on to a third, and in this way it went round and came back once more to Runi. Then he called for a drink. There happened to be a store of casserie in the house; probably the women had been busy for some days past in making it, little thinking that it was destined to be prematurely consumed. A large jarful was produced; Runi politely quaffed the first cup; I followed; then the others; and the women drank also, a woman taking about one cupful to a man's three. Runi and I, however, drank

the most, for we had our positions as the two principal personages there to maintain. Tongues were loosened now; for the alcohol, small as the quantity contained in this mild liquor is, had begun to tell on our brains. I had not their pottle-shaped stomach, made to hold unlimited quantities of meat and drink; but I was determined on this most important occasion not to deserve my host's contempt—to be compared, perhaps, to the small bird that delicately picks up six drops of water in its bill and is satisfied. I would measure my strength against his, and if necessary drink myself into a state of insensibility. At last I was scarcely able to stand on my legs. But even the seasoned old savage was affected by this time. *In vino veritas*, said the ancients; and the principle holds good where there is no vinum, but only mild casserie. Runi now informed me that he had once known a white man, that he was a bad man, which had caused him to say that all white men were bad; even as David, still more sweepingly, had proclaimed that all men were liars. Now he found that it was not so, that I was a good man. His friendliness increased with intoxication. He presented me with a curious little tinder-box, made from the conical tail of an armadillo, hollowed out, and provided with a wooden stopper;—this to be used in place of the box I had deprived myself of. He also furnished me with a grass hammock, and had it hung up there and then, so that I could lie down when inclined. There was nothing he would not do for me. And at last, when many more cups had been emptied, and a third or fourth jar brought out, he began to unburthen his heart of its dark and dangerous

secrets. He shed tears—for the "man without a tear" dwells not in the woods of Guayana: tears for those who had been treacherously slain long years ago; for his father, who had been killed by Tripica, the father of Managa, who was still above ground. But let him and all his people beware of Runi. He had spilt their blood before, he had fed the fox and vulture with their flesh, and would never rest while Managa lived with his people at Uritay—the five hills of Uritay, which were two days' journey from Parahuari. While thus talking of his old enemy he lashed himself into a kind of frenzy, smiting his chest and gnashing his teeth; and finally seizing a spear, he buried its point deep into the clay floor, only to wrench it out and strike it into the earth again and again, to show how he would serve Managa, and any one of Managa's people he might meet with — man, woman, or child. Then he staggered out from the door to flourish his spear; and looking to the north-west, he shouted aloud to Managa to come and slay his people and burn down his house, as he had so often threatened to do.

"Let him come! Let Managa come!" I cried, staggering out after him. "I am your friend, your brother; I have no spear and no arrows, but I have this—this!" And here I drew out and flourished my revolver. "Where is Managa?" I continued. "Where are the hills of Uritay?" He pointed to a star low down in the south-west. "Then," I shouted, "let this bullet find Managa, sitting by the fire among his people, and let him fall and pour out his blood on the ground!" And with that I discharged my pistol in the direction he had pointed to.

A scream of terror burst out from the women and children, while Runi at my side, in an access of fierce delight and admiration, turned and embraced me. It was the first and last embrace I ever suffered from a naked male savage, and although this did not seem a time for fastidious feelings, to be hugged to his sweltering body was an unpleasant experience.

More cups of casserie followed this outburst; and at last, unable to keep it up any longer, I staggered to my hammock; but being unable to get into it, Runi, overflowing with kindness, came to my assistance, whereupon we fell and rolled together on the floor. Finally, I was raised by the others and tumbled into my swinging bed, and fell at once into a deep, dreamless sleep, from which I did not awake until after sunrise on the following morning.

CHAPTER II

IT is fortunate that casserie is manufactured by an extremely slow, laborious process, since the women, who are the drink-makers, in the first place have to reduce the material (cassava bread) to a pulp by means of their own molars, after which it is watered down and put away in troughs to ferment. Great is the diligence of these willing slaves; but, work how they will, they can only satisfy their lords' love of a big drink at long intervals. Such a function as that at which I had assisted is therefore the result of much patient mastication and silent fermentation—the delicate flower of a plant that has been a long time growing.

Having now established myself as one of the family, at the cost of some disagreeable sensations and a pang or two of self-disgust, I resolved to let nothing further trouble me at Parahuari, but to live the easy, careless life of the idle man, joining in hunting and fishing expeditions when in the mood; at other times enjoying existence in my own way, apart from my fellows, conversing with wild nature in that solitary place.

Besides Runi, there were, in our little community, two oldish men, his cousins I believe, who had wives and grown-up children. Another family consisted of Piaké, Runi's

nephew, his brother Kua-kó—about whom there will be much to say—and a sister Oalava. Piaké had a wife and two children; Kua-kó was unmarried and about nineteen or twenty years old; Oalava was the youngest of the three. Last of all, who should perhaps have been first, was Runi's mother, called Cla-cla, probably in imitation of the cry of some bird, for in these latitudes a person is rarely, perhaps never, called by his or her real name, which is a secret jealously preserved, even from near relations. I believe that Cla-cla herself was the only living being who knew the name her parents had bestowed on her at birth. She was a very old woman, spare in figure, brown as old sun-baked leather, her face written over with innumerable wrinkles, and her long coarse hair perfectly white; yet she was exceedingly active, and seemed to do more work than any other woman in the community; more than that, when the day's toil was over and nothing remained for the others to do, then Cla-cla's night work would begin; and this was to talk all the others, or at all events all the men, to sleep. She was like a self-regulating machine, and punctually every evening, when the door was closed, and the night-fire made up, and every man in his hammock, she would set herself going, telling the most interminable stories, until the last listener was fast asleep: later in the night, if any man woke with a snort or grunt, off she would go again, taking up the thread of the tale where she had dropped it.

Old Cla-cla amused me very much, by night and day, and I seldom tired of watching her owlish countenance as she sat by the fire, never allowing it to sink low for want of fuel; always studying the pot when it was on to

simmer, and at the same time attending to the movements of the others about her, ready at a moment's notice to give assistance or to dart out on a stray chicken or refractory child.

So much did she amuse me, although without intending it, that I thought it would be only fair, in my turn, to do something for her entertainment. I was engaged one day in shaping a wooden foil with my knife, whistling and singing snatches of old melodies at my work, when all at once I caught sight of the ancient dame looking greatly delighted, chuckling internally, nodding her head, and keeping time with her hands. Evidently she was able to appreciate a style of music superior to that of the aboriginals, and forthwith I abandoned my foils for the time and set about the manufacture of a guitar, which cost me much labour, and brought out more ingenuity than I had ever thought myself capable of. To reduce the wood to the right thinness, then to bend and fasten it with wooden pegs and with gums, to add the arm, frets, keys, and finally the catgut strings—those of another kind being out of the question—kept me busy for some days. When completed it was a rude instrument, scarcely tunable; nevertheless when I smote the strings, playing lively music, or accompanied myself in singing, I found that it was a great success, and so was as much pleased with my own performance as if I had had the most perfect guitar ever made in old Spain. I also skipped about the floor, strum-strumming at the same time, instructing them in the most lively dances of the whites, in which the feet must

be as nimble as the player's fingers. It is true that these exhibitions were always witnessed by the adults with a profound gravity, which would have disheartened a stranger to their ways. They were a set of hollow bronze statues that looked at me, but I knew that the living animals inside of them were tickled at my singing, strumming, and pirouetting. Cla-cla was, however, an exception, and encouraged me not infrequently by emitting a sound, half cackle and half screech, by way of laughter; for she had come to her second childhood, or, at all events, had dropped the stolid mask which the young Guayana savage, in imitation of his elders, adjusts to his face at about the age of twelve, to wear it thereafter all his life long, or only to drop it occasionally when very drunk. The youngsters also openly manifested their pleasure, although, as a rule, they try to restrain their feelings in the presence of grown-up people, and with them I became a great favourite.

By-and-by I returned to my foil-making, and gave them fencing lessons, and sometimes invited two or three of the biggest boys to attack me simultaneously, just to show how easily I could disarm and kill them. This practice excited some interest in Kua-kó, who had a little more of curiosity and geniality and less of the put-on dignity of the others, and with him I became most intimate. Fencing with Kua-kó was highly amusing: no sooner was he in position, foil in hand, than all my instructions were thrown to the winds, and he would charge and attack me in his own barbarous manner, with the result that I would send his foil spinning a dozen

yards away, while he, struck motionless, would gaze after it in open-mouthed astonishment.

Three weeks had passed by not unpleasantly when, one morning, I took it into my head to walk by myself across that somewhat sterile savannah west of the village and stream, which ended, as I have said, in a long, low, stony ridge. From the village there was nothing to attract the eye in that direction; but I wished to get a better view of that great solitary hill or mountain of Ytaioa, and of the cloud-like summits beyond it in the distance. From the stream the ground rose in a gradual slope, and the highest part of the ridge for which I made was about two miles from the starting-point—a parched brown plain, with nothing growing on it but scattered tussocks of sere hair-like grass.

When I reached the top and could see the country beyond, I was agreeably disappointed at the discovery that the sterile ground extended only about a mile and a quarter on the further side, and was succeeded by a forest—a very inviting patch of woodland covering five or six square miles, occupying a kind of oblong basin, extending from the foot of Ytaioa on the north to a low range of rocky hills on the south. From the wooded basin long narrow strips of forest ran out in various directions like the arms of an octopus, one pair embracing the slopes of Ytaioa, another much broader belt extending along a valley which cut through the ridge of hills on the south side at right angles, and was lost to sight beyond; far away in the west and south and north distant mountains appeared, not in regular ranges, but in

groups or singly, or looking like blue banked-up clouds on the horizon.

Glad at having discovered the existence of this forest so near home, and wondering why my Indian friends had never taken me to it, or ever went out on that side, I set forth with a light heart to explore it for myself, regretting only that I was without a proper weapon for procuring game. The walk from the ridge over the savannah was easy, as the barren, stony ground sloped downward the whole way. The outer part of the wood on my side was very open, composed in most part of dwarf trees that grow on stony soil, and scattered thorny bushes bearing a yellow pea-shaped blossom. Presently I came to thicker wood, where the trees were much taller and in greater variety; and after this came another sterile strip, like that on the edge of the wood, where stone cropped out from the ground and nothing grew except the yellow-flowered thorn bushes. Passing this sterile ribbon, which seemed to extend to a considerable distance north and south, and was fifty to a hundred yards wide, the forest again became dense and the trees large, with much undergrowth in places obstructing the view and making progress difficult.

I spent several hours in this wild paradise, which was so much more delightful than the extensive gloomier forests I had so often penetrated in Guayana: for here, if the trees did not attain to such majestic proportions, the variety of vegetable forms was even greater; as far as I went it was nowhere dark under the trees, and the number of lovely parasites everywhere illustrated the kindly influence of light and air. Even where the trees

were largest the sunshine penetrated, subdued by the foliage to exquisite greenish-golden tints, filling the wide lower spaces with tender half-lights, and faint blue-and-grey shadows. Lying on my back and gazing up, I felt reluctant to rise and renew my ramble. For what a roof was that above my head! Roof I call it, just as the poets in their poverty sometimes describe the infinite ethereal sky by that word; but it was no more roof-like and hindering to the soaring spirit than the higher clouds that float in changing forms and tints, and like the foliage chasten the intolerable noonday beams. How far above me seemed that leafy cloudland into which I gazed! Nature, we know, first taught the architect to produce by long colonnades the illusion of distance; but the light-excluding roof prevents him from getting the same effect above. Here Nature is unapproachable with her green, airy canopy, a sun-impregnated cloud—cloud above cloud; and though the highest may be unreached by the eye, the beams yet filter through, illuming the wide spaces beneath—chamber succeeded by chamber, each with its own special lights and shadows. Far above me, but not nearly so far as it seemed, the tender gloom of one such chamber or space is traversed now by a golden shaft of light falling through some break in the upper foliage, giving a strange glory to everything it touches—projecting leaves, and beard-like tuft of moss, and snaky bush-rope. And in the most open part of that most open space, suspended on nothing to the eye, the shaft reveals a tangle of shining silver threads—the web of some large tree-spider. These seemingly distant, yet distinctly visible threads, serve to

remind me that the human artist is only able to get his horizontal distance by a monotonous reduplication of pillar and arch, placed at regular intervals, and that the least departure from this order would destroy the effect. But Nature produces her effects at random, and seems only to increase the beautiful illusion by that infinite variety of decoration in which she revels, binding tree to tree in a tangle of anaconda-like lianas, and dwindling down from these huge cables to airy webs and hair-like fibres that vibrate to the wind of the passing insect's wing.

Thus in idleness, with such thoughts for company, I spent my time, glad that no human being, savage or civilised, was with me. It was better to be alone to listen to the monkeys that chattered without offending; to watch them occupied with the unserious business of their lives. With that luxuriant tropical nature, its green clouds and illusive aerial spaces, full of mystery, they harmonised well in language, appearance, and motions;—mountebank angels, living their fantastic lives far above earth in a half-way heaven of their own.

I saw more monkeys on that morning than I usually saw in the course of a week's rambling. And other animals were seen; I particularly remember two accouries I startled, that after rushing away a few yards stopped and stood peering back at me as if not knowing whether to regard me as friend or enemy. Birds, too, were strangely abundant; and altogether this struck me as being the richest hunting-ground I had seen, and it astonished me to think that the Indians of the village did not appear to visit it.

On my return in the afternoon I gave an enthusiastic account of my day's ramble, speaking not of the things that had moved my soul, but only of those which move the Guayana Indian's soul—the animal food he craves, and which, one would imagine, Nature would prefer him to do without, so hard he finds it to wrest a sufficiency from her. To my surprise they shook their heads and looked troubled at what I said; and finally, my host informed me that the wood I had been in was a dangerous place; that if they went there to hunt a great injury would be done to them; and he finished by advising me not to visit it again.

I began to understand from their looks and the old man's vague words that their fear of the wood was superstitious. If dangerous creatures had existed there—tigers, or camoodis, or solitary murderous savages—they would have said so; but when I pressed them with questions they could only repeat that "something bad" existed in the place, that animals were abundant there because no Indian who valued his life dared venture into it. I replied that unless they gave me some more definite information I should certainly go again, and put myself in the way of the danger they feared.

My reckless courage, as they considered it, surprised them; but they had already begun to find out that their superstitions had no effect on me, that I listened to them as to stories invented to amuse a child, and for the moment they made no further attempt to dissuade me.

Next day I returned to the forest of evil report, which had now a new and even greater charm—the fascination of the unknown and the mysterious; still, the warning I had

received made me distrustful and cautious at first, for I could not help thinking about it. When we consider how much of their life is passed in the woods, which become as familiar to them as the streets of our native town to us, it seems almost incredible that these savages have a superstitious fear of all forests, fearing them as much, even in the bright light of day, as a nervous child with memory filled with ghost-stories fears a dark room. But, like the child in the dark room, they fear the forest only when alone in it, and for this reason always hunt in couples or parties. What, then, prevented them from visiting this particular wood, which offered so tempting a harvest? The question troubled me not a little; at the same time I was ashamed of the feeling, and fought against it; and in the end I made my way to the same sequestered spot where I had rested so long on my previous visit.

In this place I witnessed a new thing, and had a strange experience. Sitting on the ground in the shade of a large tree, I began to hear a confused noise as of a coming tempest of wind mixed with shrill calls and cries. Nearer and nearer it came, and at last a multitude of birds of many kinds, but mostly small, appeared in sight swarming through the trees, some running on the trunks and larger branches, others flitting through the foliage, and many keeping on the wing, now hovering and now darting this way or that. They were all busily searching for and pursuing the insects, moving on at the same time, and in a very few minutes they had finished examining the trees near me, and were gone; but not satisfied with what I had witnessed, I jumped up and rushed after the flock to

keep it in sight. All my caution and all recollection of what the Indians had said was now forgot, so great was my interest in this bird-army; but as they moved on without pause they quickly left me behind, and presently my career was stopped by an impenetrable tangle of bushes, vines, and roots of large trees extending like huge cables along the ground. In the midst of this leafy labyrinth I sat down on a projecting root to cool my blood before attempting to make my way back to my former position. After that tempest of motion and confused noises the silence of the forest seemed very profound; but before I had been resting many moments it was broken by a low strain of exquisite bird-melody, wonderfully pure and expressive, unlike any musical sound I had ever heard before. It seemed to issue from a thick cluster of broad leaves of a creeper only a few yards from where I sat. With my eyes fixed on this green hiding-place I waited with suspended breath for its repetition, wondering whether any civilised being had ever listened to such a strain before. Surely not, I thought, else the fame of so divine a melody would long ago have been noised abroad. I thought of the rialejo, the celebrated organ-bird or flute-bird, and of the various ways in which hearers are affected by it. To some its warbling is like the sound of a beautiful mysterious instrument, while to others it seems like the singing of a blithe-hearted child with a highly melodious voice. I had often heard and listened with delight to the singing of the rialejo in the Guayana forests, but this song, or musical phrase, was utterly unlike it in character. It was

purer, more expressive, softer—so low that at a distance of forty yards I could hardly have heard it. But its greatest charm was its resemblance to the human voice —a voice purified and brightened to something almost angelic. Imagine, then, my impatience as I sat there straining my sense, my deep disappointment when it was not repeated! I rose at length very reluctantly and slowly began making my way back; but when I had progressed about thirty yards, again the sweet voice sounded just behind me, and turning quickly I stood still and waited. The same voice, but not the same song—not the same phrase; the notes were different, more varied and rapidly enunciated, as if the singer had been more excited. The blood rushed to my heart as I listened; my nerves tingled with a strange new delight, the rapture produced by such music heightened by a sense of mystery. Before many moments I heard it again, not rapid now, but a soft warbling, lower than at first, infinitely sweet and tender, sinking to lisping sounds that soon ceased to be audible; the whole having lasted as long as it would take me to repeat a sentence of a dozen words. This seemed the singer's farewell to me, for I waited and listened in vain to hear it repeated; and after getting back to the starting-point I sat for upwards of an hour, still hoping to hear it once more!

The westering sun at length compelled me to quit the wood, but not before I had resolved to return the next morning and seek for the spot where I had met with so enchanting an experience. After crossing the sterile belt I have mentioned within the wood, and just before I came

to the open outer edge where the stunted trees and bushes die away on the border of the savannah, what was my delight and astonishment at hearing the mysterious melody once more! It seemed to issue from a clump of bushes close by; but by this time I had come to the conclusion that there was a ventriloquism in this woodland voice which made it impossible for me to determine its exact direction. Of one thing I was, however, now quite convinced, and that was that the singer had been following me all the time. Again and again as I stood there listening it sounded, now so faint and apparently far off as to be scarcely audible; then all at once it would ring out bright and clear within a few yards of me, as if the shy little thing had suddenly grown bold; but, far or near, the vocalist remained invisible, and at length the tantalising melody ceased altogether.

CHAPTER III

I WAS not disappointed on my next visit to the forest, nor on several succeeding visits; and this seemed to show that if I was right in believing that these strange, melodious utterances proceeded from one individual, then the bird or being, although still refusing to show itself, was always on the watch for my appearance, and followed me wherever I went. This thought only served to increase my curiosity; I was constantly pondering over the subject, and at last concluded that it would be best to induce one of the Indians to go with me to the wood on the chance of his being able to explain the mystery.

One of the treasures I had managed to preserve in my sojourn with these children of nature, who were always anxious to become possessors of my belongings, was a small prettily fashioned metal match-box, opening with a spring. Remembering that Kua-kó, among others, had looked at this trifle with covetous eyes—the covetous way in which they all looked at it had given it a fictitious value in my own—I tried to bribe him with the offer of it to accompany me to my favourite haunt. The brave young hunter refused again and again; but on each occasion he offered to perform some other service or to give me something in exchange for the box. At last I told him that I would

give it to the first person who should accompany me, and fearing that someone would be found valiant enough to win the prize, he at length plucked up a spirit, and on the next day, seeing me going out for a walk, he all at once offered to go with me. He cunningly tried to get the box before starting—his cunning, poor youth! was not very deep. I told him that the forest we were about to visit abounded with plants and birds unlike any I had seen elsewhere, that I wished to learn their names, and everything about them, and that when I had got the required information the box would be his—not sooner. Finally we started, he, as usual, armed with his zabatana, with which, I imagined, he would procure more game than usually fell to his little poisoned arrows. When we reached the wood I could see that he was ill at ease: nothing would persuade him to go into the deeper parts; and even where it was very open and light he was constantly gazing into bushes and shadowy places, as if expecting to see some frightful creature lying in wait for him. This behaviour might have had a disquieting effect on me had I not been thoroughly convinced that his fears were purely superstitious, and that there could be no dangerous animal in a spot I was accustomed to walk in every day. My plan was to ramble about with an unconcerned air, occasionally pointing out an uncommon tree or shrub or vine, or calling his attention to a distant bird cry and asking the bird's name, in the hope that the mysterious voice would make itself heard, and that he would be able to give me some explanation of it. But for upwards of two hours we moved about, hearing nothing except the usual bird voices,

and during all that time he never stirred a yard from my side nor made an attempt to capture anything. At length we sat down under a tree, in an open spot close to the border of the wood. He sat down very reluctantly, and seemed more troubled in his mind than ever, keeping his eyes continually roving about, while he listened intently to every sound. The sounds were not few, owing to the abundance of animal and especially of bird life in this favoured spot. I began to question my companion as to some of the cries we heard. There were notes and cries familiar to me as the crowing of the cock—parrot screams and yelping of toucans, the distant wailing calls of maam and duraquara; and shrill laughter-like notes of the large tree-climber as it passed from tree to tree; the quick whistle of cotingas; and strange throbbing and thrilling sounds, as of pigmies beating on metallic drums, of the skulking pitta-thrushes; and with these mingled other notes less well known. One came from the treetops, where it was perpetually wandering amid the foliage—a low note, repeated at intervals of a few seconds, so thin and mournful and full of mystery, that I half expected to hear that it proceeded from the restless ghost of some dead bird. But no; he only said that it was uttered by a "little bird"—too little presumably to have a name. From the foliage of a neighbouring tree came a few tinkling chirps, as of a small mandolin, two or three strings of which had been carelessly struck by the player. He said that it came from a small green frog that lived in trees; and in this way my rude Indian—vexed perhaps at being asked such trivial questions—brushed away the pretty

fantasies my mind had woven in the woodland solitude. For I often listened to this tinkling music, and it had suggested the idea that the place was frequented by a tribe of fairy-like troubadour monkeys, and that if I could only be quick-sighted enough I might one day be able to detect the minstrel sitting, in a green tunic perhaps, cross-legged on some high, swaying bough, carelessly touching his mandolin suspended from his neck by a yellow ribbon.

By-and-by a bird came with low, swift flight, its great tail spread open fan-wise, and perched itself on an exposed bough not thirty yards from us. It was all of a chestnut-red colour, long-bodied, in size like a big pigeon: its actions showed that its curiosity had been greatly excited, for it jerked from side to side, eyeing us first with one eye, then the other, while its long tail rose and fell in a measured way.

"Look, Kua-kó," I said in a whisper, "there is a bird for you to kill."

But he only shook his head, still watchful.

"Give me the blow-pipe, then," I said, with a laugh, putting out my hand to take it. But he refused to let me take it, knowing that it would only be an arrow wasted if I attempted to shoot anything.

As I persisted in telling him to kill the bird, he at last bent his lips near me and said in a half-whisper, as if fearful of being overheard, "I can kill nothing here. If I shot at the bird the daughter of the Didi would catch the dart in her hand and throw it back and hit me here," touching his breast just over his heart.

I laughed again, saying to myself, with some amuse-

ment, that Kua-kó was not such a bad companion after all—that he was not without imagination. But in spite of my laughter his words roused my interest, and suggested the idea that the voice I was curious about had been heard by the Indians, and was as great a mystery to them as to me; since not being like that of any creature known to them, it would be attributed by their superstitious minds to one of the numerous demons or semi-human monsters inhabiting every forest, stream, and mountain; and fear of it would drive them from the wood. In this case, judging from my companion's words, they had varied the form of the superstition somewhat, inventing a daughter of a water-spirit to be afraid of. My thought was that if their keen, practised eyes had never been able to see this flitting woodland creature with a musical soul, it was not likely that I would succeed in my quest.

I began to question him, but he now appeared less inclined to talk and more frightened than ever, and each time I attempted to speak he imposed silence, with a quick gesture of alarm, while he continued to stare about him with dilated eyes. All at once he sprang to his feet as if overcome with terror, and started running at full speed. His fear infected me, and, springing up, I followed as fast as I could, but he was far ahead of me, running for dear life; and before I had gone forty yards my feet were caught in a creeper trailing along the surface, and I measured my length on the ground. The sudden, violent shock almost took away my senses for a moment, but when I jumped up and stared round to see no unspeak-

able monster—Curupitá or other—rushing on to slay and devour me there and then, I began to feel ashamed of my cowardice; and in the end I turned and walked back to the spot I had just quitted and sat down once more. I even tried to hum a tune, just to prove to myself that I had completely recovered from the panic caught from the miserable Indian; but it is never possible in such cases to get back one's serenity immediately, and a vague suspicion continued to trouble me for a time. After sitting there for half an hour or so, listening to distant bird sounds, I began to recover my old confidence, and even to feel inclined to penetrate further into the wood. All at once, making me almost jump, so sudden it was, so much nearer and louder than I had ever heard it before, the mysterious melody began. Unmistakably it was uttered by the same being heard on former occasions; but to-day it was different in character. The utterance was far more rapid, with fewer silent intervals, and it had none of the usual tenderness in it, nor ever once sunk to that low, whisper-like talking, which had seemed to me as if the spirit of the wind had breathed its low sighs in syllables and speech. Now it was not only loud, rapid, and continuous, but, while still musical, there was an incisiveness in it, a sharp ring as of resentment, which made it strike painfully on the sense.

The impression of an intelligent unhuman being addressing me in anger took so firm a hold on my mind that the old fear returned, and, rising, I began to walk rapidly away, intending to escape from the wood. The voice continued violently rating me, as it seemed to my

mind, moving with me, which caused me to accelerate my steps; and very soon I would have broken into a run, when its character began to change again. There were pauses now, intervals of silence, long or short, and after each one the voice came to my ear with a more subdued and dulcet sound—more of that melting, flute-like quality it had possessed at other times; and this softness of tone, coupled with the talking-like form of utterance, gave me the idea of a being no longer incensed, addressing me now in a peaceable spirit, reasoning away my unworthy tremors, and imploring me to remain with it in the wood. Strange as this voice without a body was, and always productive of a slightly uncomfortable feeling on account of its mystery, it seemed impossible to doubt that it came to me now in a spirit of pure friendliness; and when I had recovered my composure I found a new delight in listening to it—all the greater because of the fear so lately experienced, and of its seeming intelligence. For the third time I reseated myself on the same spot, and at intervals the voice talked to me there for some time, and to my fancy expressed satisfaction and pleasure at my presence. But later, without losing its friendly tone, it changed again. It seemed to move away and to be thrown back from a considerable distance; and, at long intervals, it would approach me again with a new sound, which I began to interpret as of command, or entreaty. Was it, I asked myself, inviting me to follow? And if I obeyed, to what delightful discoveries or frightful dangers might it lead? My curiosity, together with the belief that the being—I called it being, not bird, now—

was friendly to me, overcame all timidity, and I rose and walked at random towards the interior of the wood. Very soon I had no doubt left that the being had desired me to follow; for there was now a new note of gladness in its voice, and it continued near me as I walked, at intervals approaching me so closely as to set me staring into the surrounding shadowy places like poor scared Kua-kó.

On this occasion, too, I began to have a new fancy, for fancy or illusion I was determined to regard it, that some swift-footed being was treading the ground near me; that I occasionally caught the faint rustle of a light foot-step, and detected a motion in leaves and fronds and thread-like stems of creepers hanging near the surface, as if some passing body had touched and made them tremble; and once or twice that I even had a glimpse of a grey, misty object moving at no great distance in the deeper shadows.

Led by this wandering tricksy being, I came to a spot where the trees were very large and the damp dark ground almost free from undergrowth; and here the voice ceased to be heard. After patiently waiting and listening for some time I began to look about me with a slight feeling of apprehension. It was still about two hours before sunset; only in this place the shade of the vast trees made a perpetual twilight: moreover, it was strangely silent here, the few bird cries that reached me coming from a long distance. I had flattered myself that the voice had become to some extent intelligible to me; its outburst of anger caused no doubt by my cowardly flight

after the Indian; then its recovered friendliness which had induced me to return; and, finally, its desire to be followed. Now that it had led me to this place of shadow and profound silence, and had ceased to speak and to lead, I could not help thinking that this was my goal, that I had been brought to this spot with a purpose, that in this wild and solitary retreat some tremendous adventure was about to befall me.

As the silence continued unbroken there was time to dwell on this thought. I gazed before me and listened intently, scarcely breathing, until the suspense became painful—too painful at last, and I turned and took a step with the idea of going back to the border of the wood, when close by, clear as a silver bell, sounded the voice once more, but only for a moment—two or three syllables in response to my movement, then it was silent again.

Once more I was standing still, as if in obedience to a command, in the same state of suspense; and whether the change was real or only imagined I know not, but the silence every minute grew more profound and the gloom deeper. Imaginary terrors began to assail me. Ancient fables of men allured by beautiful forms and melodious voices to destruction all at once acquired a fearful significance. I recalled some of the Indian beliefs, especially that of the misshapen, man-devouring monster who is said to beguile his victims into the dark forest by mimicking the human voice—the voice sometimes of a woman in distress—or by singing some strange and beautiful melody. I grew almost afraid to look round lest I should catch

sight of him stealing towards me on his huge feet with toes pointing backwards, his mouth snarling horribly to display his great green fangs. It was distressing to have such fancies in this wild, solitary spot—hateful to feel their power over me when I knew that they were nothing but fancies and creations of the savage mind. But if these supernatural beings had no existence, there were other monsters, only too real, in these woods which it would be dreadful to encounter alone and unarmed, since against such adversaries a revolver would be as ineffectual as a popgun. Some huge camoodi, able to crush my bones like brittle twigs in its constricting coils, might lurk in these shadows, and approach me stealthily, unseen in its dark colour on the dark ground. Or some jaguar or black tiger might steal towards me, masked by a bush or tree-trunk, to spring upon me unawares. Or worse still, this way might suddenly come a pack of those swift-footed, unspeakably terrible hunting-leopards, from which every living thing in the forest flies with shrieks of consternation or else falls paralysed in their path to be instantly torn to pieces and devoured.

A slight rustling sound in the foliage above me made me start and cast up my eyes. High up, where a pale gleam of tempered sunlight fell through the leaves, a grotesque human-like face, black as ebony and adorned with a great red beard, appeared staring down upon me. In another moment it was gone. It was only a large araguato, or howling monkey, but I was so unnerved that I could not get rid of the idea that it was something more than a monkey. Once more I moved, and

again, the instant I moved my foot, clear, and keen, and imperative, sounded the voice! It was no longer possible to doubt its meaning. It commanded me to stand still—to wait—to watch—to listen! Had it cried "Listen! Do not move!" I could not have understood it better. Trying as the suspense was, I now felt powerless to escape. Something very terrible, I felt convinced, was about to happen, either to destroy or to release me from the spell that held me.

And while I stood thus rooted to the ground, the sweat standing in large drops on my forehead, all at once close to me sounded a cry, fine and clear at first, and rising at the end to a shriek so loud, piercing, and unearthly in character that the blood seemed to freeze in my veins, and a despairing cry to heaven escaped my lips; then, before that long shriek expired, a mighty chorus of thunderous voices burst forth around me; and in this awful tempest of sound I trembled like a leaf; and the leaves on the trees were agitated as if by a high wind, and the earth itself seemed to shake beneath my feet. Indescribably horrible were my sensations at that moment; I was deafened, and would possibly have been maddened had I not, as by a miracle, chanced to see a large araguato on a branch overhead, roaring with open mouth and inflated throat and chest.

It was simply a concert of howling monkeys which had so terrified me! But my extreme fear was not strange in the circumstances; since everything that had led up to the display, the gloom and silence, the period of suspense and my heated imagination, had raised my mind to the

highest degree of excitement and expectancy. I had rightly conjectured, no doubt, that my unseen guide had led me to that spot for a purpose; and the purpose had been to set me in the midst of a congregation of araguatos to enable me for the first time fully to appreciate their unparalleled vocal powers. I had always heard them at a distance: here they were gathered in scores, possibly hundreds—the whole araguato population of the forest, I should think—close to me; and it may give some faint conception of the tremendous power and awful character of the sound thus produced by their combined voices when I say that this animal—miscalled "howler" in English—would outroar the mightiest lion that ever woke the echoes of an African wilderness.

This roaring concert, which lasted three or four minutes, having ended, I lingered a few minutes longer on the spot, and not hearing the voice again, went back to the edge of the wood, and then started on my way back to the village.

CHAPTER IV

PERHAPS I was not capable of thinking quite coherently on what had just happened until I was once more fairly outside of the forest shadows—out in that clear open daylight, where things seem what they are, and imagination, like a juggler detected and laughed at, hastily takes itself out of the way. As I walked homewards I paused midway on the barren ridge to gaze back on the scene I had left, and then the recent adventure began to take a semi-ludicrous aspect in my mind. All that circumstance of preparation, that mysterious prelude to something unheard of, unimaginable, surpassing all fables ancient and modern, and all tragedies —to end at last in a concert of howling monkeys! Certainly the concert was very grand, indeed one of the most astounding in nature, but still—I sat down on a stone and laughed freely.

The sun was sinking behind the forest, its broad red disc still showing through the topmost leaves, and the higher part of the foliage was of a luminous green, like green flame, throwing off flakes of quivering, fiery light, but lower down the trees were in profound shadow.

I felt very light-hearted while I gazed on this scene; for how pleasant it was just now to think of the strange

experience I had passed through—to think that I had come safely out of it, that no human eye had witnessed my weakness, and that the mystery existed still to fascinate me! For, ludicrous as the denouement now looked, the cause of all, the voice itself, was a thing to marvel at more than ever. That it proceeded from an intelligent being I was firmly convinced; and although too materialistic in my way of thinking to admit for a moment that it was a supernatural being, I still felt that there was something more than I had at first imagined in Kua-kó's speech about a daughter of the Didi. That the Indians knew a great deal about the mysterious voice, and had held it in great fear, seemed evident. But they were savages, with ways that were not mine; and however friendly they might be towards one of a superior race, there was always in their relations with him a low cunning, prompted partly by suspicion, underlying their words and actions. For the white man to put himself mentally on their level is not more impossible than for these aborigines to be perfectly open, as children are, towards the white. Whatever subject the stranger within their gates exhibits an interest in, that they will be reticent about; and their reticence, which conceals itself under easily invented lies or an affected stupidity, invariably increases with his desire for information. It was plain to them that some very unusual interest took me to the wood, consequently I could not expect that they would tell me anything they might know to enlighten me about the matter; and I concluded that Kua-kó's words about the daughter of the Didi, and what she

would do if he blew an arrow at a bird, had accidentally escaped him in a moment of excitement. Nothing, therefore, was to be gained by questioning them, or, at all events, by telling them how much the subject attracted me. And I had nothing to fear; my independent investigations had made this much clear to me; the voice might proceed from a very frolicsome and tricksy creature, full of wild fantastic humours, but nothing worse. It was friendly to me, I felt sure; at the same time it might not be friendly towards the Indians; for, on that day, it had made itself heard only after my companion had taken flight; and it had then seemed incensed against me, possibly because the savage had been in my company.

That was the result of my reflections on the day's events, when I returned to my entertainer's roof, and sat down among my friends to refresh myself with stewed fowl and fish from the household pot, into which a hospitable woman invited me with a gesture to dip my fingers.

Kua-kó was lying in his hammock, smoking, I think—certainly not reading. When I entered he lifted his head and stared at me, probably surprised to see me alive, unharmed, and in a placid temper. I laughed at the look, and somewhat disconcerted, he dropped his head down again. After a minute or two I took the metal match-box and tossed it on to his breast. He clutched it, and starting up, stared at me in the utmost astonishment. He could scarcely believe his good fortune; for he had failed to carry out his part of the compact and had resigned himself to the loss of the coveted prize. Jump-

ing down to the floor, he held up the box triumphantly, his joy overcoming the habitual stolid look; while all the others gathered about him, each trying to get the box into his own hands to admire it again, notwithstanding that they had all seen it a dozen times before. But it was Kua-kó's now and not the stranger's, and therefore more nearly their own than formerly, and must look different, more beautiful, with a brighter polish on the metal. And that wonderful enamelled cock on the lid—figured in Paris probably, but just like a cock in Guayana, the pet bird which they no more think of killing and eating than we do our purring pussies and lemon-coloured canaries — must now look more strikingly valiant and cock-like than ever, with its crimson comb and wattles, burnished red hackles, and dark green arching tail-plumes. But Kua-kó, while willing enough to have it admired and praised, would not let it out of his hands, and told them pompously that it was not theirs for them to handle, but his—Kua-ko's—for all time; that he had won it by accompanying me—valorous man that he was!—to that evil wood into which they—timid, inferior creatures that they were!—would never have ventured to set foot. I am not translating his words, but that was what he gave them to understand pretty plainly, to my great amusement.

After the excitement was over, Runi, who had maintained a dignified calm, made some roundabout remarks, apparently with the object of eliciting an account of what I had seen and heard in the forest of evil fame. I replied carelessly that I had seen a great many birds and monkeys

—monkeys so tame that I might have procured one if I had had a blow-pipe, in spite of my never having practised shooting with that weapon.

It interested them to hear about the abundance and tameness of the monkeys, although it was scarcely news: but how tame they must have been when I, the stranger not to the manner born—not naked, brown-skinned, lynx-eyed, and noiseless as an owl in his movements—had yet been able to look closely at them! Runi only remarked, apropos of what I had told him, that they could not go there to hunt; then he asked me if I feared nothing.

"Nothing," I replied carelessly. "The things you fear hurt not the white man, and are no more than this to me," saying which I took up a little white wood-ash in my hand and blew it away with my breath. "And against other enemies I have this," I added, touching my revolver. A brave speech, just after that araguato episode; but I did not make it without blushing—mentally.

He shook his head, and said it was a poor weapon against some enemies; also—truly enough—that it would procure no birds and monkeys for the stew-pot.

Next morning my friend Kua-kó, taking his zabatana, invited me to go out with him, and I consented with some misgivings, thinking he had overcome his superstitious fears, and, inflamed by my account of the abundance of game in the forest, intended going there with me. The previous day's experience had made me think that it would be better in the future to go there alone. But I was giving the poor youth more credit than he deserved: it

was far from his intention to face the terrible unknown again. We went in a different direction, and tramped for hours through woods where birds were scarce and only of the smaller kinds. Then my guide surprised me a second time by offering to teach me to use the zabatana. This, then, was to be my reward for giving him the box! I readily consented, and with the long weapon, awkward to carry, in my hand, and imitating the noiseless movements and cautious, watchful manner of my companion, I tried to imagine myself a simple Guayana savage, with no knowledge of that artificial social state to which I had been born, dependent on my skill and little roll of poison-darts for a livelihood. By an effort of the will I emptied myself of my life experience and knowledge—or as much of it as possible—and thought only of the generations of my dead imaginary progenitors, who had ranged these woods back to the dim forgotten years before Columbus; and if the pleasure I had in the fancy was childish, it made the day pass quickly enough. Kua-kó was constantly at my elbow to assist and give advice; and many an arrow I blew from the long tube, and hit no bird. Heaven knows what I hit, for the arrows flew away on their wide and wild career to be seen no more, except a few which my keen-eyed comrade marked to their destination and managed to recover. The result of our day's hunting was a couple of birds, which Kua-kó, not I, shot, and a small opossum his sharp eyes detected high up a tree lying coiled up on an old nest, over the side of which the animal had incautiously allowed his snaky tail to dangle. The number of darts I wasted must have been a rather serious

loss to him, but he did not seem troubled at it, and made no remark.

Next day, to my surprise, he volunteered to give me a second lesson, and we went out again. On this occasion he had provided himself with a large bundle of darts, but—wise man!—they were not poisoned, and it therefore mattered little whether they were wasted or not. I believe that on this day I made some little progress; at all events, my teacher remarked that before long I would be able to hit a bird. This made me smile and answer that if he could place me within twenty yards of a bird not smaller than a small man I might manage to touch it with an arrow.

This speech had a very unexpected and remarkable effect. He stopped short in his walk, stared at me wildly, then grinned, and finally burst into a roar of laughter, which was no bad imitation of the howling monkey's performance, and smote his naked thighs with tremendous energy. At length recovering himself, he asked whether a small woman was not the same as a small man, and being answered in the affirmative, went off into a second extravagant roar of laughter.

Thinking it was easy to tickle him while he continued in this mood, I began making any number of feeble jokes —feeble, but quite as good as the one which had provoked such outrageous merriment—for it amused me to see him acting in this unusual way. But they all failed of their effect—there was no hitting the bull's-eye a second time; he would only stare vacantly at me, then grunt like a peccary—not appreciatively—and walk on.

Still, at intervals he would go back to what I said about hitting a very big bird, and roar again, as if this wonderful joke was not easily exhausted.

Again on the third day we were out together practising at the birds—frightening, if not killing them; but before noon, finding that it was his intention to go to a distant spot where he expected to meet with larger game, I left him and returned to the village. The blow-pipe practice had lost its novelty, and I did not care to go on all day and every day with it; more than that, I was anxious after so long an interval to pay a visit to *my* wood, as I began to call it, in the hope of hearing that mysterious melody, which I had grown to love and to miss when even a single day passed without it.

CHAPTER V

AFTER making a hasty meal at the house, I started, full of pleasing anticipations, for the wood; for how pleasant a place it was to be in! What a wild beauty and fragrance and melodiousness it possessed above all forests, because of that mystery that drew me to it! And it was mine, truly and absolutely—as much mine as any portion of earth's surface could belong to any man—mine with all its products; the precious woods and fruits and fragrant gums that would never be trafficked away; its wild animals that man would never persecute; nor would any jealous savage dispute my ownership or pretend that it was part of his hunting-ground. As I crossed the savannah I played with this fancy; but when I reached the ridgy eminence, to look down once more on my new domain, the fancy changed to a feeling so keen that it pierced to my heart, and was like pain in its intensity, causing tears to rush to my eyes. And caring not in that solitude to disguise my feelings from myself, and from the wide heaven that looked down and saw me—for this is the sweetest thing that solitude has for us, that we are free in it, and no convention holds us—I dropped on my knees and kissed the stony ground, then casting up my eyes, thanked the

Author of my being for the gift of that wild forest, those green mansions where I had found so great a happiness!

Elated with this strain of feeling, I reached the wood not long after noon; but no melodious voice gave me familiar and expected welcome; nor did my invisible companion make itself heard at all on that day, or, at all events, not in its usual bird-like warbling language. But on this day I met with a curious little adventure, and heard something very extraordinary, very mysterious, which I could not avoid connecting in my mind with the unseen warbler that so often followed me in my rambles.

It was an exceedingly bright day, without cloud, but windy, and finding myself in a rather open part of the wood, near its border, where the breeze could be felt, I sat down to rest on the lower part of a large branch, which was half broken, but still remained attached to the trunk of the tree, while resting its terminal twigs on the ground. Just before me, where I sat, grew a low, wide-spreading plant, covered with broad, round, polished leaves; and the roundness, stiffness, and perfectly horizontal position of the upper leaves made them look like a collection of small platforms or round table-tops placed nearly on a level. Through the leaves, to the height of a foot or more above them, a slender dead stem protruded, and from a twig at its summit depended a broken spider's web. A minute dead leaf had become attached to one of the loose threads, and threw its small but distinct shadow on the platform leaves below: and as

it trembled and swayed in the current of air the black spot trembled with it or flew swiftly over the bright green surfaces, and was seldom at rest. Now, as I sat looking down on the leaves and the small dancing shadow, scarcely thinking of what I was looking at, I noticed a small spider, with a flat body and short legs, creep cautiously out on to the upper surface of a leaf. Its pale red colour barred with velvet black first drew my attention to it, for it was beautiful to the eye; and presently I discovered that this was no web-spinning, sedentary spider, but a wandering hunter, that captured its prey, like a cat, by stealing on it concealed and making a rush or spring at the last. The moving shadow had attracted it, and, as the sequel showed, was mistaken for a fly running about over the leaves, and flitting from leaf to leaf. Now began a series of wonderful manœuvres on the spider's part, with the object of circumventing the imaginary fly, which seemed specially designed to meet this special case; for certainly no insect had ever before behaved in quite so erratic a manner. Each time the shadow flew past, the spider ran swiftly in the same direction, hiding itself under the leaves, always trying to get near without alarming its prey; and then the shadow would go round and round in a small circle, and some new strategic move on the part of the hunter would be called forth. I became deeply interested in this curious scene; I began to wish that the shadow would remain quiet for a moment or two, so as to give the hunter a chance. And at last I had my wish: the shadow was almost motionless, and the spider moving towards it, yet seeming not to move,

and as it crept closer I fancied that I could almost see the little striped body quivering with excitement. Then came the final scene: swift and straight as an arrow the hunter shot himself on to the fly-like shadow, then wriggled round and round, evidently trying to take hold of his prey with fangs and claws; and finding nothing under him, he raised the fore part of his body vertically, as if to stare about him in search of the delusive fly; but the action may have simply expressed astonishment. At this moment I was just on the point of giving free and loud vent to the laughter which I had been holding in, when, just behind me, as if from some person who had been watching the scene over my shoulder and was as much amused as myself at its termination, sounded a clear trill of merry laughter. I started up and looked hastily around, but no living creature was there. The mass of loose foliage I stared into was agitated, as if from a body having just pushed through it. In a moment the leaves and fronds were motionless again; still, I could not be sure that a slight gust of wind had not shaken them. But I was so convinced that I had heard close to me a real human laugh, or sound of some living creature that exactly simulated a laugh, that I carefully searched the ground about me, expecting to find a being of some kind. But I found nothing, and going back to my seat on the hanging branch, I remained seated for a considerable time, at first only listening, then pondering on the mystery of that sweet trill of laughter; and finally I began to wonder whether I, like the spider that chased the shadow, had been

deluded, and had seemed to hear a sound that was not a sound.

On the following day I was in the wood again, and after a two or three hours' ramble, during which I heard nothing, thinking it useless to haunt the known spots any longer, I turned southwards and penetrated into a denser part of the forest, where the undergrowth made progress difficult. I was not afraid of losing myself: the sun above and my sense of direction, which was always good, would enable me to return to the starting-point.

In this direction I had been pushing resolutely on for over half an hour, finding it no easy matter to make my way without constantly deviating to this side or that from the course I wished to keep, when I came to a much more open spot. The trees were smaller and scantier here, owing to the rocky nature of the ground, which sloped rather rapidly down; but it was moist and overgrown with mosses, ferns, creepers, and low shrubs, all of the liveliest green. I could not see many yards ahead owing to the bushes and tall fern fronds; but presently I began to hear a low, continuous sound, which, when I had advanced twenty or thirty yards further, I made out to be the gurgling of running water; and at the same moment I made the discovery that my throat was parched and my palms tingling with heat. I hurried on, promising myself a cool draught, when all at once, above the soft dashing and gurgling of the water, I caught yet another sound—a low, warbling note, or succession of notes, which might have been emitted by a bird. But it startled me nevertheless—bird-like warbling sounds had

come to mean so much to me—and pausing, I listened intently. It was not repeated, and finally, treading with the utmost caution so as not to alarm the mysterious vocalist, I crept on until, coming to a greenheart with a quantity of feathery foliage of a shrub growing about its roots, I saw that just beyond the tree the ground was more open still, letting in the sunlight from above, and that the channel of the stream I sought was in this open space, about twenty yards from me, although the water was still hidden from sight. Something else was there, which I did see; instantly my cautious advance was arrested. I stood gazing with concentrated vision, scarcely daring to breathe lest I should scare it away.

It was a human being—a girl form, reclining on the moss among the ferns and herbage, near the roots of a small tree. One arm was doubled behind her neck for her head to rest upon, while the other arm was held extended before her, the hand raised towards a small brown bird perched on a pendulous twig just beyond its reach. She appeared to be playing with the bird, possibly amusing herself by trying to entice it on to her hand; and the hand appeared to tempt it greatly, for it persistently hopped up and down, turning rapidly about this way and that, flirting its wings and tail, and always appearing just on the point of dropping on to her finger. From my position it was impossible to see her distinctly, yet I dared not move. I could make out that she was small, not above four feet six or seven inches in height, in figure slim, with delicately shaped little hands and feet. Her feet were bare, and her only

garment was a slight chemise-shaped dress reaching below her knees, of a whitish-grey colour, with a faint lustre as of a silky material. Her hair was very wonderful; it was loose and abundant, and seemed wavy or curly, falling in a cloud on her shoulders and arms. Dark it appeared, but the precise tint was indeterminable, as was that of her skin, which looked neither brown nor white. Altogether, near to me as she actually was, there was a kind of mistiness in the figure which made it appear somewhat vague and distant, and a greenish grey seemed the prevailing colour. This tint I presently attributed to the effect of the sunlight falling on her through the green foliage; for once, for a moment, she raised herself to reach her finger nearer to the bird, and then a gleam of unsubdued sunlight fell on her hair and arm, and the arm at that moment appeared of a pearly whiteness, and the hair, just where the light touched it, had a strange lustre and play of iridescent colour.

I had not been watching her more than three seconds before the bird, with a sharp, creaking little chirp, flew up and away in sudden alarm; at the same moment she turned and saw me through the light leafy screen. But although catching sight of me thus suddenly, she did not exhibit alarm like the bird; only her eyes, wide open, with a surprised look in them, remained immovably fixed on my face. And then slowly, imperceptibly—for I did not notice the actual movement, so gradual and smooth it was, like the motion of a cloud of mist which changes its form and place, yet to the eye seems not to have moved—she rose to her knees, to her feet, retired, and with face

still towards me, and eyes fixed on mine, finally disappeared, going as if she had melted away into the verdure. The leafage was there occupying the precise spot where she had been a moment before—the feathery foliage of an acacia shrub, and stems and broad, arrow-shaped leaves of an aquatic plant, and slim, drooping fern fronds, and they were motionless, and seemed not to have been touched by something passing through them. She had gone, yet I continued still, bent almost double, gazing fixedly at the spot where I had last seen her, my mind in a strange condition, possessed by sensations which were keenly felt and yet contradictory. So vivid was the image left on my brain that she still seemed to be actually before my eyes; and she was not there, nor had been, for it was a dream, an illusion, and no such being existed, or could exist, in this gross world: and at the same time I knew that she had been there—that imagination was powerless to conjure up a form so exquisite.

With the mental image I had to be satisfied, for although I remained for some hours at that spot I saw her no more, nor did I hear any familiar melodious sound. For I was now convinced that in this wild solitary girl I had at length discovered the mysterious warbler that so often followed me in the wood. At length, seeing that it was growing late, I took a drink from the stream and slowly and reluctantly made my way out of the forest, and went home.

Early next day I was back in the wood full of delightful anticipations, and had no sooner got well among the trees than a soft, warbling sound reached my ears; it was

like that heard on the previous day just before catching sight of the girl among the ferns. So soon! thought I, elated, and with cautious steps I proceeded to explore the ground, hoping again to catch her unawares. But I saw nothing; and only after beginning to doubt that I had heard anything unusual, and had sat down to rest on a rock, the sound was repeated, soft and low as before, very near and distinct. Nothing more was heard at this spot, but an hour later, in another place, the same mysterious note sounded near me. During my remaining time in the forest I was served many times in the same way, and still nothing was seen, nor was there any change in the voice.

Only when the day was near its end did I give up my quest, feeling very keenly disappointed. It then struck me that the cause of the elusive creature's behaviour was that she had been piqued at my discovery of her in one of her most secret hiding-places in the heart of the wood, and that it had pleased her to pay me out in this manner.

On the next day there was no change; she was there again, evidently following me, but always invisible, and varied not from that one mocking note of yesterday, which seemed to challenge me to find her a second time. In the end I was vexed, and resolved to be even with her by not visiting the wood for some time. A display of indifference on my part would, I hoped, result in making her less coy in the future.

Next day, firm in my new resolution, I accompanied Kua-kó and two others to a distant spot where they

expected that the ripening fruit on a cashew tree would attract a large number of birds. The fruit, however, proved still green, so that we gathered none and killed few birds. Returning together, Kua-kó kept at my side, and by-and-by, falling behind our companions, he complimented me on my good shooting, although, as usual, I had only wasted the arrows I had blown.

"Soon you will be able to hit," he said; "hit a bird as big as a small woman"; and he laughed once more immoderately at the old joke. At last, growing confidential, he said that I would soon possess a zabatana of my own, with arrows in plenty. He was going to make the arrows himself, and his uncle Otawinki, who had a straight eye, would make the tube. I treated it all as a joke, but he solemnly assured me that he meant it.

Next morning he asked me if I was going to the forest of evil fame, and when I replied in the negative seemed surprised and, very much to *my* surprise, evidently disappointed. He even tried to persuade me to go, where before I had been earnestly recommended not to go, until, finding that I would not, he took me with him to hunt in the woods. By-and-by he returned to the same subject: he could not understand why I would not go to that wood, and asked me if I had begun to grow afraid.

"No, not afraid," I replied; "but I know the place well, and am getting tired of it." I had seen everything in it—birds and beasts—and had heard all its strange noises.

"Yes, heard," he said, nodding his head knowingly;

"but you have *seen* nothing strange; your eyes are not good enough yet."

I laughed contemptuously, and answered that I had seen everything strange the wood contained, including a strange young girl; and I went on to describe her appearance, and finished by asking if he thought a white man was frightened at the sight of a young girl.

What I said astonished him; then he seemed greatly pleased, and, growing still more confidential and generous than on the previous day, he said that I would soon be a most important personage among them, and greatly distinguish myself. He did not like it when I laughed at all this, and went on with great seriousness to speak of the unmade blow-pipe that would be mine—speaking of it as if it had been something very great, equal to the gift of a large tract of land, or the governorship of a province, north of the Orinoco. And by-and-by he spoke of something else more wonderful even than the promise of a blow-pipe, with arrows galore, and this was that young sister of his, whose name was Oolava, a maid of about sixteen, shy and silent and mild-eyed, rather lean and dirty; not ugly, nor yet prepossessing. And this copper-coloured little drab of the wilderness he proposed to bestow in marriage on me! Anxious to pump him, I managed to control my muscles, and asked him what authority he—a young nobody, who had not yet risen to the dignity of buying a wife for himself—could have to dispose of a sister in this off-hand way? He replied that there would be no difficulty: that Runi would give his consent, as would also Otawinki, Piaké,

and other relations; and last, *and* least, according to the matrimonial customs of these latitudes, Oolava herself would be ready to bestow her person—queyou, worn fig-leaf-wise, necklace of accouri teeth, and all—on so worthy a suitor as myself. Finally, to make the prospect still more inviting, he added that it would not be necessary for me to subject myself to any voluntary tortures to prove myself a man and fitted to enter into the purgatorial state of matrimony. He was a great deal too considerate, I said, and, with all the gravity I could command, asked him what kind of torture he would recommend. For me—so valorous a person—"no torture," he answered magnanimously. But he—Kua-kó—had made up his mind as to the form of torture he meant to inflict some day on his own person. He would prepare a large sack and into it put fire-ants—"As many as that!" he exclaimed triumphantly, stooping and filling his two hands with loose sand. He would put them in the sack, and then get into it himself naked, and tie it tightly round his neck, so as to show to all spectators that the hellish pain of innumerable venomous stings in his flesh could be endured without a groan, and with an unmoved countenance. The poor youth had not an original mind, since this was one of the commonest forms of self-torture among the Guayana tribes. But the sudden wonderful animation with which he spoke of it, the fiendish joy that illumined his usually stolid countenance, sent a sudden disgust and horror through me. But what a strange inverted kind of fiendishness is this, which delights at the anticipation of torture inflicted on oneself

and not on an enemy! And towards others these savages are mild and peaceable! No, I could not believe in their mildness; that was only on the surface, when nothing occurred to rouse their savage, cruel instincts. I could have laughed at the whole matter, but the exulting look on my companion's face had made me sick of the subject, and I wished not to talk any more about it.

But he would talk still—this fellow whose words, as a rule, I had to take out of his mouth with a fork, as we say; and still on the same subject, he said that not one person in the village would expect to see me torture myself; that after what I would do for them all—after delivering them from a great evil—nothing further would be expected of me.

I asked him to explain his meaning; for it now began to appear plain that in everything he had said he had been leading up to some very important matter. It would, of course, have been a great mistake to suppose that my savage was offering me a blow-pipe and a marketable virgin sister from purely disinterested motives.

In reply he went back to that still unforgotten joke about my being able eventually to hit a bird as big as a small woman with an arrow. Out it all came, when he went on to ask me if that mysterious girl I had seen in the wood was not of a size to suit me as a target when I had got my hand in with a little more practice. That was the great work I was asked to do for them—that shy, mysterious girl with the melodious wild-bird voice was the evil being I was asked to slay with poisoned arrows! This was why he now wished me to go often to the wood,

to become more and more familiar with her haunts and habits, to overcome all shyness and suspicion in her; and at the proper moment, when it would be impossible to miss my mark, to plant the fatal arrow! The disgust he had inspired in me before, when gloating over anticipated tortures, was a weak and transient feeling to what I now experienced. I turned on him in a sudden transport of rage, and in a moment would have shattered the blow-pipe I was carrying in my hand on his head, but his astonished look as he turned to face me made me pause, and prevented me from committing so fatal an indiscretion. I could only grind my teeth and struggle to overcome an almost overpowering hatred and wrath. Finally, I flung the tube down and bade him take it, telling him that I would not touch it again if he offered me all the sisters of all the savages in Guayana for wives.

He continued gazing at me mute with astonishment, and prudence suggested that it would be best to conceal as far as possible the violent animosity I had conceived against him. I asked him somewhat scornfully if he believed that I should ever be able to hit anything—bird or human being—with an arrow. "No," I almost shouted, so as to give vent to my feelings in some way, and drawing my revolver, "this is the white man's weapon; but he kills men with it—men who attempt to kill or injure him—but neither with this nor any other weapon does he murder innocent young girls treacherously."

After that we went on in silence for some time; at length he said that the being I had seen in the wood and was not afraid of was no innocent young girl, but

a daughter of the Didi, an evil being: and that so long as she continued to inhabit the wood they could not go there to hunt, and even in other woods they constantly went in fear of meeting her. Too much disgusted to talk with him, I went on in silence; and when we reached the stream near the village I threw off my clothes and plunged into the water to cool my anger before going in to the others.

CHAPTER VI

THINKING about the forest girl while lying awake that night, I came to the conclusion that I had made it sufficiently plain to her how little her capricious behaviour had been relished, and had therefore no need to punish myself more by keeping any longer out of my beloved green mansions. Accordingly, next day, after the heavy rain that fell during the morning hours had ceased, I set forth about noon to visit the wood. Overhead the sky was clear again; but there was no motion in the heavy sultry atmosphere, while dark blue masses of banked-up clouds on the western horizon threatened a fresh downpour later in the day. My mind was, however, now too greatly excited at the prospect of a possible encounter with the forest nymph to allow me to pay any heed to these ominous signs.

I had passed through the first strip of wood, and was in the succeeding stony sterile space, when a gleam of brilliant colour close by on the ground caught my sight. It was a snake lying on the bare earth; had I kept on without noticing it, I should most probably have trodden upon or dangerously near it. Viewing it closely, I found that it was a coral snake, famed as much for its beauty and singularity as for its deadly character. It was about

three feet long, and very slim; its ground colour a brilliant vermilion, with broad jet-black rings at equal distances round its body, each black ring or band divided by a narrow yellow strip in the middle. The symmetrical pattern and vividly contrasted colours would have given it the appearance of an artificial snake made by some fanciful artist, but for the gleam of life in its bright coils. Its fixed eyes, too, were living gems, and from the point of its dangerous arrowy head the glistening tongue flickered ceaselessly as I stood a few yards away regarding it.

"I admire you greatly, Sir Serpent," I said, or thought, "but it is dangerous, say the military authorities, to leave an enemy or possible enemy in the rear; the person who does such a thing must be either a bad strategist or a genius, and I am neither."

Retreating a few paces, I found and picked up a stone about as big as a man's hand, and hurled it at the dangerous-looking head with the intention of crushing it; but the stone hit upon the rocky ground a little on one side of the mark, and being soft flew into a hundred small fragments. This roused the creature's anger, and in a moment with raised head he was gliding swiftly towards me. Again I retreated, not so slowly on this occasion: and finding another stone, I raised and was about to launch it when a sharp, ringing cry issued from the bushes growing near, and, quickly following the sound, forth stepped the forest girl; no longer elusive and shy, vaguely seen in the shadowy wood, but boldly challenging attention, exposed to the full power of the meridian sun, which made

her appear luminous and rich in colour beyond example. Seeing her thus, all those emotions of fear and abhorrence invariably excited in us by the sight of an active venomous serpent in our path vanished instantly from my mind: I could now only feel astonishment and admiration at the brilliant being as she advanced with swift, easy, undulating motion towards me; or rather towards the serpent, which was now between us, moving more and more slowly as she came nearer. The cause of this sudden wonderful boldness, so unlike her former habit, was unmistakable. She had been watching my approach from some hiding-place among the bushes, ready no doubt to lead me a dance through the wood with her mocking voice, as on previous occasions, when my attack on the serpent caused that outburst of wrath. The torrent of ringing and to me inarticulate sounds in that unknown tongue, her rapid gestures, and above all her wide-open sparkling eyes and face aflame with colour, made it impossible to mistake the nature of her feeling.

In casting about for some term or figure of speech in which to describe the impression produced on me at that moment, I think of *waspish*, and, better still, *avispada*—literally the same word in Spanish, not having precisely the same meaning nor ever applied contemptuously—only to reject both after a moment's reflection. Yet I go back to the image of an irritated wasp as perhaps offering the best illustration; of some large tropical wasp advancing angrily towards me, as I have witnessed a hundred times, not exactly flying, but moving rapidly, half running and half flying, over the ground, with loud and angry buzz, the

glistening wings open and agitated; beautiful beyond most animated creatures in its sharp but graceful lines, polished surface, and varied brilliant colouring, and that wrathfulness that fits it so well and seems to give it additional lustre.

Wonder-struck at the sight of her strange beauty and passion, I forgot the advancing snake until she came to a stop at about five yards from me; then to my horror I saw that it was beside her naked feet. Although no longer advancing, the head was still raised high as if to strike; but presently the spirit of anger appeared to die out of it; the lifted head, oscillating a little from side to side, sunk down lower and lower to rest finally on the girl's bare instep; and lying there motionless, the deadly thing had the appearance of a gaily coloured silken garter just dropped from her leg. It was plain to see that she had no fear of it, that she was one of those exceptional persons to be found, it is said, in all countries, who possess some magnetic quality which has a soothing effect on even the most venomous and irritable reptiles.

Following the direction of my eyes, she too glanced down, but did not move her foot; then she made her voice heard again, still loud and sharp, but the anger was not now so pronounced.

"Do not fear, I shall not harm it," I said in the Indian tongue.

She took no notice of my speech, and continued speaking with increasing resentment.

I shook my head, replying that her language was unknown to me. Then by means of signs I tried to make

her understand that the creature was safe from further molestation. She pointed indignantly at the stone in my hand, which I had forgotten all about. At once I threw it from me, and instantly there was a change; the resentment had vanished, and a tender radiance lit her face like a smile.

I advanced a little nearer, addressing her once more in the Indian tongue; but my speech was evidently unintelligible to her, as she stood now glancing at the snake lying at her feet, now at me. Again I had recourse to signs and gestures; pointing to the snake, then to the stone I had cast away, I endeavoured to convey to her that in the future I would for her sake be a friend to all venomous reptiles, and that I wished her to have the same kindly feelings towards me as towards these creatures. Whether or not she understood me, she showed no disposition to go into hiding again, and continued silently regarding me with a look that seemed to express pleasure at finding herself at last thus suddenly brought face to face with me. Flattered at this, I gradually drew nearer until at the last I was standing at her side, gazing down with the utmost delight into that face which so greatly surpassed in loveliness all human faces I had ever seen or imagined.

And yet to you, my friend, it probably will not seem that she was so beautiful, since I have, alas! only the words we all use to paint commoner, coarser things, and no means to represent all the exquisite details, all the delicate lights, and shades, and swift changes of colour and expression. Moreover, is it not a fact that the strange or

unheard of can never appear beautiful in a mere description, because that which is most novel in it attracts too much attention and is given undue prominence in the picture, and we miss that which would have taken away the effect of strangeness—the perfect balance of the parts and harmony of the whole? For instance, the blue eyes of the northerner would, when first described to the black-eyed inhabitants of warm regions, seem unbeautiful and a monstrosity, because they would vividly see with the mental vision that unheard-of blueness, but not in the same vivid way the accompanying flesh and hair tints with which it harmonises.

Think, then, less of the picture as I have to paint it in words than of the feeling its original inspired in me, when looking closely for the first time on that rare loveliness, trembling with delight I mentally cried: "Oh, why has Nature, maker of so many types and of innumerable individuals of each, given to the world but one being like this?"

Scarcely had the thought formed itself in my mind before I dismissed it as utterly incredible. No, this exquisite being was without doubt one of a distinct race which had existed in this little-known corner of the continent for thousands of generations, albeit now perhaps reduced to a small and dwindling remnant.

Her figure and features were singularly delicate, but it was her colour that struck me most, which indeed made her differ from all other human beings. The colour of the skin would be almost impossible to describe, so greatly did it vary with every change of mood—and the moods were

many and transient—and with the angle on which the sunlight touched it, and the degree of light.

Beneath the trees, at a distance, it had seemed a somewhat dim white or pale grey; near in the strong sunshine it was not white, but alabastrian, semi-pellucid, showing an underlying rose-colour; and at any point where the rays fell direct this colour was bright and luminous, as we see in our fingers when held before a strong firelight. But that part of her skin that remained in shadow appeared of a dimmer white, and the underlying colour varied from dim, rosy purple to dim blue. With the skin the colour of the eyes harmonised perfectly. At first, when lit with anger, they had appeared flame-like; now the iris was of a peculiar soft or dim and tender red, a shade sometimes seen in flowers. But only when looked closely at could this delicate hue be discerned, the pupils being large, as in some grey eyes, and the long, dark, shading lashes at a short distance made the whole eye appear dark. Think not, then, of the red flower, exposed to the light and sun in conjunction with the vivid green of the foliage; think only of such a hue in the half-hidden iris, brilliant and moist with the eye's moisture, deep with the eye's depth, glorified by the outward look of a bright, beautiful soul. Most variable of all in colour was the hair, this being due to its extreme fineness and glossiness, and to its elasticity, which made it lie fleecy and loose on head, shoulders, and back; a cloud with a brightness on its surface made by the freer outer hairs, a fit setting and crown for a countenance of such rare, changeful loveliness. In the shade, viewed

closely, the general colour appeared a slate, deepening in places to purple; but even in the shade the nimbus of free flossy hairs half veiled the darker tints with a downy pallor; and at a distance of a few yards it gave the whole hair a vague, misty appearance. In the sunlight the colour varied more, looking now dark, sometimes intensely black, now of a light uncertain hue, with a play of iridescent colour on the loose surface, as we see on the glossed plumage of some birds; and at a short distance, with the sun shining full on her head, it sometimes looked white as a noonday cloud. So changeful was it and ethereal in appearance with its cloud colours, that all other human hair, even of the most beautiful golden shades, pale or red, seemed heavy and dull and dead-looking by comparison.

But more than form and colour and that enchanting variability was the look of intelligence, which at the same time seemed complementary to and one with the all-seeing, all-hearing alertness appearing in her face; the alertness one remarks in a wild creature, even when in repose and fearing nothing; but seldom in man, never perhaps in intellectual or studious man. She was a wild, solitary girl of the woods, and did not understand the language of the country in which I had addressed her. What inner or mind life could such a one have more than that of any wild animal existing in the same conditions? Yet looking at her face it was not possible to doubt its intelligence. This union in her of two opposite qualities which, with us, cannot or do not exist together, although so novel, yet struck me as the girl's principal

charm. Why had Nature not done this before—why in all others does the brightness of the mind dim that beautiful physical brightness which the wild animals have? But enough for me that that which no man had ever looked for or hoped to find existed here; that through that unfamiliar lustre of the wild life shone the spiritualising light of mind that made us kin.

These thoughts passed swiftly through my brain as I stood feasting my sight on her bright, piquant face; while she on her part gazed back into my eyes, not only with fearless curiosity, but with a look of recognition and pleasure at the encounter so unmistakably friendly that, encouraged by it, I took her arm in my hand, moving at the same time a little nearer to her. At that moment a swift, startled expression came into her eyes; she glanced down and up again into my face; her lips trembled and slightly parted as she murmured some sorrowful sounds in a tone so low as to be only just audible.

Thinking she had become alarmed and was on the point of escaping out of my hands, and fearing, above all things, to lose sight of her again so soon, I slipped my arm round her slender body to detain her, moving one foot at the same time to balance myself; and at that moment I felt a slight blow and a sharp burning sensation shoot into my leg, so sudden and intense that I dropped my arm, at the same time uttering a cry of pain, and recoiled one or two paces from her. But she stirred not when I released her; her eyes followed my movements; then she glanced down at her feet. I followed her look,

and figure to yourself my horror when I saw there the serpent I had so completely forgotten, and which even that sting of sharp pain had not brought back to remembrance! There it lay, a coil of its own tail thrown round one of her ankles, and its head, raised nearly a foot high, swaying slowly from side to side, while the swift forked tongue flickered continuously. Then—only then—I knew what had happened, and at the same time I understood the reason of that sudden look of alarm in her face, the murmuring sounds she had uttered, and the downward startled glance. Her fears had been solely for my safety, and she had warned me! Too late! too late! In moving I had trodden on or touched the serpent with my foot, and it had bitten me just above the ankle. In a few moments I began to realise the horror of my position. "Must I die! must I die! Oh, my God, is there nothing that can save me?" I cried in my heart.

She was still standing motionless in the same place: her eyes wandered back from me to the snake; gradually its swaying head was lowered again, and the coil unwound from her ankle; then it began to move away, slowly at first, and with the head a little raised, then faster, and in the end it glided out of sight. Gone!—but it had left its venom in my blood—O cursed reptile!

Back from watching its retreat, my eyes returned to her face, now strangely clouded with trouble; her eyes dropped before mine, while the palms of her hands were pressed together, and the fingers clasped and unclasped alternately. How different she seemed now; the brilliant face grown so pallid and vague-looking! But not only

because this tragic end to our meeting had pierced her with pain: that cloud in the west had grown up and now covered half the sky with vast lurid masses of vapour, blotting out the sun, and a great gloom had fallen on the earth.

That sudden twilight and a long roll of approaching thunder, reverberating from the hills, increased my anguish and desperation. Death at that moment looked unutterably terrible. The remembrance of all that made life dear pierced me to the core—all that nature was to me, all the pleasures of sense and intellect, the hopes I had cherished—all was revealed to me as by a flash of lightning. Bitterest of all was the thought that I must now bid everlasting farewell to this beautiful being I had found in the solitude—this lustrous daughter of the Didi—just when I had won her from her shyness—that I must go away into the cursed blackness of death, and never know the mystery of her life! It was that which utterly unnerved me, and made my legs tremble under me, and brought great drops of sweat to my forehead, until I thought that the venom was already doing its swift, fatal work in my veins.

With uncertain steps I moved to a stone a yard or two away and sat down upon it. As I did so the hope came to me that this girl, so intimate with nature, might know of some antidote to save me. Touching my leg, and using other signs, I addressed her again in the Indian language.

"The snake has bitten me," I said. "What shall I do? Is there no leaf, no root you know that would

save me from death? Help me! help me!" I cried in despair.

My signs she probably understood if not my words, but she made no reply; and still she remained standing motionless, twisting and untwisting her fingers, and regarding me with a look of ineffable grief and compassion.

Alas! It was vain to appeal to her: she knew what had happened, and what the result would most likely be, and pitied, but was powerless to help me. Then it occurred to me that if I could reach the Indian village before the venom overpowered me something might be done to save me. Oh, why had I tarried so long, losing so many precious minutes! Large drops of rain were falling now, and the gloom was deeper, and the thunder almost continuous. With a cry of anguish I started to my feet, and was about to rush away towards the village when a dazzling flash of lightning made me pause for a moment. When it vanished I turned a last look on the girl, and her face was deathly pale, and her hair looked blacker than night; and as she looked she stretched out her arms towards me and uttered a low, wailing cry. "Good-bye for ever!" I murmured, and turning once more from her, rushed away like one crazed into the wood. But in my confusion I had probably taken the wrong direction, for instead of coming out in a few minutes into the open border of the forest, and on to the savannah, I found myself every moment getting deeper among the trees. I stood still, perplexed, but could not shake off the conviction that I had started in the right direction. Eventually I resolved to keep on

for a hundred yards or so, and then, if no opening appeared, to turn back and retrace my steps. But this was no easy matter. I soon became entangled in a dense undergrowth, which so confused me that at last I confessed despairingly to myself that for the first time in this wood I was hopelessly lost. And in what terrible circumstances! At intervals a flash of lightning would throw a vivid blue glare down into the interior of the wood and only serve to show that I had lost myself in a place where even at noon in cloudless weather progress would be most difficult; and now the light would only last a moment, to be followed by thick gloom; and I could only tear blindly on, bruising and lacerating my flesh at every step, falling again and again only to struggle up and on again, now high above the surface climbing over prostrate trees and branches, now plunged to my middle in a pool or torrent of water.

Hopeless—utterly hopeless seemed all my mad efforts; and at each pause, when I would stand exhausted, gasping for breath, my throbbing heart almost suffocating me, a dull, continuous, teasing pain in my bitten leg served to remind me that I had but a little time left to exist—that by delaying at first I had allowed my only chance of salvation to slip by.

How long a time I spent fighting my way through this dense black wood I know not; perhaps two or three hours, only to me the hours seemed like years of prolonged agony. At last, all at once, I found that I was free of the close undergrowth, and walking on level ground: but it was darker here—darker than the darkest night; and at length,

when the lightning came and flared down through the dense roof of foliage overhead, I discovered that I was in a spot that had a strange look, where the trees were very large and grew wide apart, and with no undergrowth to impede progress beneath them. Here, recovering breath, I began to run, and after a while found that I had left the large trees behind me, and was now in a more open place, with small trees and bushes: and this made me hope for a while that I had at last reached the border of the forest. But the hope proved vain; once more I had to force my way through dense undergrowth, and finally emerged on to a slope where it was open, and I could once more see for some distance around me by such light as came through the thick pall of clouds. Trudging on to the summit of the slope, I saw that there was open savannah country beyond, and for a moment rejoiced that I had got free from the forest. A few steps more, and I was standing on the very edge of a bank, a precipice not less than fifty feet deep. I had never seen that bank before, and therefore knew that I could not be on the right side of the forest. But now my only hope was to get completely away from the trees and then to look for the village, and I began following the bank in search of a descent. No break occurred, and presently I was stopped by a dense thicket of bushes. I was about to retrace my steps when I noticed that a tall slender tree growing at the foot of the precipice, its green top not more than a couple of yards below my feet, seemed to offer a means of escape. Nerving myself with the thought that if I got crushed by the fall I should probably escape a lingering

and far more painful death, I dropped into the cloud of foliage beneath me and clutched desperately at the twigs as I fell. For a moment I felt myself sustained; but branch after branch gave way beneath my weight, and then I only remember, very dimly, a swift flight through the air before losing consciousness.

CHAPTER VII

WITH the return of consciousness, I at first had a vague impression that I was lying somewhere, injured, and incapable of motion; that it was night, and necessary for me to keep my eyes fast shut to prevent them from being blinded by almost continuous vivid flashes of lightning. Injured, and sore all over, but warm and dry—surely dry: nor was it lightning that dazzled, but firelight. I began to notice things little by little. The fire was burning on a clay floor a few feet from where I was lying. Before it, on a log of wood, sat or crouched a human figure. An old man, with chin on breast and hands clasped before his drawn-up knees; only a small portion of his forehead and nose visible to me. An Indian I took him to be, from his coarse, lank, grey hair and dark brown skin. I was in a large hut, falling at the sides to within two feet of the floor: but there were no hammocks in it, nor bows and spears, and no skins, not even under me, for I was lying on straw mats I could hear the storm still raging outside; the rush and splash of rain, and, at intervals, the distant growl of thunder. There was wind, too; I listened to it sobbing in the trees, and occasionally a puff found its way in, and blew up the white ashes at the old man's feet. and

shook the yellow flames like a flag. I remembered now how the storm began, the wild girl, the snake-bite, my violent efforts to find a way out of the wood, and, finally, that leap from the bank where recollection ended. That I had not been killed by the venomous tooth, nor the subsequent fearful fall, seemed like a miracle to me. And in that wild, solitary place, lying insensible, in that awful storm and darkness, I had been found by a fellow-creature —a savage, doubtless, but a good Samaritan all the same —who had rescued me from death! I was bruised all over and did not attempt to move, fearing the pain it would give me; and I had a racking headache; but these seemed trifling discomforts after such adventures and such perils. I felt that I had recovered or was recovering from that venomous bite; that I would live and not die—live to return to my country; and the thought filled my heart to overflowing, and tears of gratitude and happiness rose to my eyes.

At such times a man experiences benevolent feelings, and would willingly bestow some of that overplus of happiness on his fellows to lighten other hearts; and this old man before me, who was probably the instrument of my salvation, began greatly to excite my interest and compassion. For he seemed so poor in his old age and rags, so solitary and dejected as he sat there with knees drawn up, his great, brown, bare feet looking almost black by contrast with the white wood-ashes about them! What could I do for him? What could I say to cheer his spirits in that Indian language, which has few or no words to express kindly feelings? Unable to think of anything

better to say, I at length suddenly cried aloud, "Smoke, old man! Why do you not smoke? It is good to smoke."

He gave a mighty start, and, turning, fixed his eyes on me. Then I saw that he was not a pure Indian, for although as brown as old leather, he wore a beard and moustache. A curious face had this old man, which looked as if youth and age had made it a battling ground. His forehead was smooth, except for two parallel lines in the middle running its entire length, dividing it in zones; his arched eyebrows were black as ink, and his small black eyes were bright and cunning, like the eyes of some wild carnivorous animal. In this part of his face youth had held its own, especially in the eyes, which looked young and lively. But lower down age had conquered, scribbling his skin all over with wrinkles, while moustache and beard were white as thistledown.

"Aha, the dead man is alive again!" he exclaimed, with a chuckling laugh. This in the Indian tongue; then in Spanish he added, "But speak to me in the language you know best, señor; for if you are not a Venezuelan call me an owl."

"And you, old man?" said I.

"Ah, I was right! Why, sir, what I am is plainly written on my face. Surely you do not take me for a pagan! I might be a black man from Africa, or an Englishman, but an Indian—that, no! But a minute ago you had the goodness to invite me to smoke. How, sir, can a poor man smoke who is without tobacco?"

"Without tobacco—in Guayana!"

"Can you believe it? But, sir, do not blame me; if the beast that came one night and destroyed my plants when ripe for cutting had taken pumpkins and sweet potatoes instead, it would have been better for him, if curses have any effect. And the plant grows slowly, sir—it is not an evil weed to come to maturity in a single day. And as for other leaves in the forest, I smoke them, yes; but there is no comfort to the lungs in such smoke."

"My tobacco-pouch was full," I said. "You will find it in my coat, if I did not lose it."

"The saints forbid!" he exclaimed. "Grandchild—Rima, have you got a tobacco-pouch with the other things? Give it to me."

Then I first noticed that another person was in the hut, a slim young girl, who had been seated against the wall on the other side of the fire, partially hid by the shadows. She had my leather belt, with the revolver in its case, and my hunting-knife attached, and the few articles I had had in my pockets, on her lap. Taking up the pouch, she handed it to him, and he clutched it with a strange eagerness.

"I will give it back presently, Rima," he said. "Let me first smoke a cigarette—and then another."

It seemed probable from this that the good old man had already been casting covetous eyes on my property, and that his granddaughter had taken care of it for me. But how the silent, demure girl had kept it from him was a puzzle, so intensely did he seem now to enjoy it, drawing the smoke vigorously into his lungs, and after keeping it ten or fifteen seconds there, letting it fly out

again from mouth and nose in blue jets and clouds. His face softened visibly, he became more and more genial and loquacious, and asked me how I came to be in that solitary place. I told him that I was staying with the Indian Runi, his neighbour.

"But, señor," he said, "if it is not an impertinence, how is it that a young man of so distinguished an appearance as yourself, a Venezuelan, should be residing with these children of the devil?"

"You love not your neighbours, then?"

"I know them, sir—how should I love them?" He was rolling up his second or third cigarette by this time, and I could not help noticing that he took a great deal more tobacco than he required in his fingers, and that the surplus on each occasion was conveyed to some secret receptacle among his rags. "Love them, sir! They are infidels, and therefore the good Christian must only hate them. They are thieves—they will steal from you before your very face, so devoid are they of all shame. And also murderers; gladly would they burn this poor thatch above my head, and kill me and my poor grandchild, who shares this solitary life with me, if they had the courage. But they are all arrant cowards, and fear to approach me—fear even to come into this wood. You would laugh to hear what they are afraid of—a child would laugh to hear it!"

"What do they fear?" I said, for his words had excited my interest in a great degree.

"Why, sir, would you believe it? They fear this child—my granddaughter, seated there before you. A poor

innocent girl of seventeen summers, a Christian who knows her Catechism, and would not harm the smallest thing that God has made—no, not a fly, which is not regarded on account of its smallness. Why, sir, it is due to her tender heart that you are safely sheltered here, instead of being left out of doors in this tempestuous night."

"To her—to this girl?" I returned in astonishment. "Explain, old man, for I do not know how I was saved."

"To-day, señor, through your own heedlessness you were bitten by a venomous snake."

"Yes, that is true, although I do not know how it came to your knowledge. But why am I not a dead man, then—have you done something to save me from the effects of the poison?"

"Nothing. What could I do so long after you were bitten? When a man is bitten by a snake in a solitary place he is in God's hands. He will live or die as God wills. There is nothing to be done. But surely, sir, you remember that my poor grandchild was with you in the wood when the snake bit you?"

"A girl was there—a strange girl I have seen and heard before when I have walked in the forest. But not this girl—surely not this girl!"

"No other," said he, carefully rolling up another cigarette.

"It is not possible!" I returned.

"Ill would you have fared, sir, had she not been there. For after being bitten, you rushed away into the thickest part of the wood, and went about in a circle like a

demented person for Heaven knows how long. But she never left you; she was always close to you—you might have touched her with your hand. And at last some good angel who was watching you, in order to stop your career, made you mad altogether and caused you to jump over a precipice and lose your senses. And you were no sooner on the ground than she was with you—ask me not how *she* got down! And when she had propped you up against the bank she came for me. Fortunately the spot where you had fallen is near—not five hundred yards from the door. And I, on my part, was willing to assist her in saving you; for I knew it was no Indian that had fallen, since she loves not that breed, and they come not here. It was not an easy task, for you weigh, señor; but between us we brought you in."

While he spoke the girl continued sitting in the same listless attitude as when I first observed her, with eyes cast down and hands folded in her lap. Recalling that brilliant being in the wood that had protected the serpent from me, and calmed its rage, I found it hard to believe his words, and still felt a little incredulous.

"Rima—that is your name, is it not?" I said. "Will you come here and stand before me, and let me look closely at you?"

"Si, señor," she meekly answered; and removing the things from her lap she stood up; then, passing behind the old man, came and stood before me, her eyes still bent on the ground—a picture of humility.

She had the figure of the forest girl, but wore now a scanty faded cotton garment, while the loose cloud of

hair was confined in two plaits and hung down her back. The face also showed the same delicate lines, but of the brilliant animation and variable colour and expression there appeared no trace. Gazing at her countenance, as she stood there silent, shy, and spiritless before me, the image of her brighter self came vividly to my mind, and I could not recover from the astonishment I felt at such a contrast.

Have you ever observed a humming-bird moving about in an aërial dance among the flowers—a living prismatic gem that changes its colour with every change of position —how in turning it catches the sunshine on its burnished neck and gorget plumes — green and gold and flame-coloured, the beams changing to visible flakes as they fall, dissolving into nothing, to be succeeded by others and yet others? In its exquisite form, its changeful splendour, its swift motions and intervals of aërial suspension, it is a creature of such fairly-like loveliness as to mock all description. And have you seen this same fairy-like creature suddenly perch itself on a twig, in the shade, its misty wings and fanlike tail folded, the iridescent glory vanished, looking like some common dull-plumaged little bird sitting listless in a cage? Just so great was the difference in the girl, as I had seen her in the forest and as she now appeared under the smoky roof in the firelight.

After watching her for some moments I spoke: "Rima, there must be a good deal of strength in that frame of yours, which looks so delicate; will you raise me up a little?"

She went down on one knee, and placing her arms round me assisted me to a sitting posture.

"Thank you, Rima—O misery!" I groaned. "Is there a bone left unbroken in my poor body?"

"Nothing broken," cried the old man, clouds of smoke flying out with his words. "I have examined you well—legs, arms, ribs. For this is how it was, señor. A thorny bush into which you fell saved you from being flattened on the stony ground. But you are bruised, sir, black with bruises; and there are more scratches of thorns on your skin than letters on a written page."

"A long thorn might have entered my brain," I said, "from the way it pains. Feel my forehead, Rima: is it very hot and dry?"

She did as I asked, touching me lightly with her little cool hand. "No, señor, not hot, but warm and moist," she said.

"Thank Heaven for that!" I said. "Poor girl! And you followed me through the wood in all that terrible storm! Ah, if I could lift my bruised arm I would take your hand to kiss it in gratitude for so great a service. I owe you my life, sweet Rima—what shall I do to repay so great a debt?"

The old man chuckled as if amused, but the girl lifted not her eyes nor spoke.

"Tell me, sweet child," I said, "for I cannot realise it yet; was it really you that saved the serpent's life when I would have killed it—did you stand by me in the wood with the serpent lying at your feet?"

"Yes, señor," came her gentle answer.

"And it was you I saw in the wood one day, lying on the ground playing with a small bird?"

"Yes, señor."

"And it was you that followed me so often among the trees, calling to me, yet always hiding so that I could never see you?"

"Yes, señor."

"Oh, this is wonderful!" I exclaimed; whereat the old man chuckled again.

"But tell me this, my sweet girl," I continued. "You never addressed me in Spanish; what strange musical language was it you spoke to me in?"

She shot a timid glance at my face and looked troubled at the question, but made no reply.

"Señor," said the old man, "that is a question which you must excuse my child from answering. Not, sir, from want of will, for she is docile and obedient, though I say it, but there is no answer beyond what I can tell you. And this is, sir, that all creatures, whether man or bird, have the voice that God has given them; and in some the voice is musical and in others not so."

"Very well, old man," said I to myself; "there let the matter rest for the present. But, if I am destined to live and not die, I shall not long remain satisfied with your too simple explanation."

"Rima," I said, "you must be fatigued; it is thoughtless of me to keep you standing here so long."

Her face brightened a little, and bending down she replied in a low voice, "I am not fatigued, sir. Let me get you something to eat now."

She moved quickly away to the fire, and presently returned with an earthenware dish of roasted pumpkin and sweet potatoes, and kneeling at my side fed me deftly with a small wooden spoon. I did not feel grieved at the absence of meat and the stinging condiments the Indians love, nor did I even remark that there was no salt in the vegetables, so much was I taken up with watching her beautiful delicate face while she ministered to me. The exquisite fragrance of her breath was more to me than the most delicious viands could have been; and it was a delight each time she raised the spoon to my mouth to catch a momentary glimpse of her eyes, which now looked dark as wine when we lift the glass to see the ruby gleam of light within the purple. But she never for a moment laid aside the silent, meek, constrained manner; and when I remembered her bursting out in her brilliant wrath on me, pouring forth that torrent of stinging invective in her mysterious language, I was lost in wonder and admiration at the change in her, and at her double personality. Having satisfied my wants she moved quietly away, and raising a straw mat disappeared behind it into her own sleeping-apartment, which was divided off by a partition from the room I was in.

The old man's sleeping-place was a wooden cot or stand on the opposite side of the room, but he was in no hurry to sleep, and after Rima had left us put a fresh log on the blaze, and lit another cigarette. Heaven knows how many he had smoked by this time. He became very talkative and called to his side his two dogs, which I had not noticed in the room before, for me to see. It amused

me to hear their names—Susio and Goloso: Dirty and Greedy. They were surly-looking brutes, with rough yellow hair, and did not win my heart, but according to his account they possessed all the usual canine virtues; and he was still holding forth on the subject when I fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN morning came I was too stiff and sore to move, and not until the following day was I able to creep out to sit in the shade of the trees. My old host, whose name was Nuflo, went off with his dogs, leaving the girl to attend to my wants. Two or three times during the day she appeared to serve me with food and drink, but she continued silent and constrained in manner as on the first evening of seeing her in the hut.

Late in the afternoon old Nuflo returned, but did not say where he had been; and shortly afterwards Rima reappeared, demure as usual, in her faded cotton dress, her cloud of hair confined in two long plaits. My curiosity was more excited than ever, and I resolved to get to the bottom of the mystery of her life. The girl had not shown herself responsive, but now that Nuflo was back I was treated to as much talk as I cared to hear. He talked of many things, only omitting those which I desired to hear about; but his pet subject appeared to be the divine government of the world —"God's politics" —and its manifest imperfections, or in other words, the manifold abuses which from time to time had been allowed to creep into it. The old man was pious, but like many of his class in my country, he permitted himself

to indulge in very free criticisms of the powers above, from the King of Heaven down to the smallest saint whose name figures in the calendar.

"These things, señor," he said, "are not properly managed. Consider my position. Here am I compelled for my sins to inhabit this wilderness with my poor granddaughter——"

"She is not your granddaughter!" I suddenly interrupted, thinking to surprise him into an admission.

But he took his time to answer. "Señor, we are never sure of anything in this world. Not absolutely sure. Thus, it may come to pass that you will one day marry, and that your wife will in due time present you with a son—one that will inherit your fortune and transmit your name to posterity. And yet, sir, in this world, you will never know to a certainty that he is your son."

"Proceed with what you were saying," I returned, with some dignity.

"Here we are," he continued, "compelled to inhabit this land and do not meet with proper protection from the infidel. Now, sir, this is a crying evil, and it is only becoming in one who has the true faith, and is a loyal subject of the All-Powerful, to point out with due humility that He is growing very remiss in His affairs, and is losing a good deal of His prestige. And what, señor, is at the bottom of it? Favoritism. We know that the Supreme cannot Himself be everywhere, attending to each little trike-traka that arises in the world—matters altogether beneath His notice; and that He must, like the

President of Venezuela or the Emperor of Brazil, appoint men—angels if you like—to conduct His affairs and watch over each district. And it is manifest that for this country of Guayana the proper person has not been appointed. Every evil is done and there is no remedy, and the Christian has no more consideration shown him than the infidel. Now, señor, in a town near the Orinoco I once saw on a church the archangel Michael, made of stone, and twice as tall as a man, with one foot on a monster shaped like a cayman, but with bat's wings, and a head and neck like a serpent. Into this monster he was thrusting his spear. That is the kind of person that should be sent to rule these latitudes—a person of firmness and resolution, with strength in his wrist. And yet it is probable that this very man—this St. Michael—is hanging about the palace, twirling his thumbs, waiting for an appointment, while other weaker men, and—Heaven forgive me for saying it, not above a bribe, perhaps—are sent out to rule over this province."

On this string he would harp by the hour; it was a lofty subject on which he had pondered much in his solitary life, and he was glad of an opportunity of ventilating his grievance and expounding his views. At first it was a pure pleasure to hear Spanish again, and the old man, albeit ignorant of letters, spoke well; but this, I may say, is a common thing in our country, where the peasant's quickness of intelligence and poetic feeling often compensate for want of instruction. His views also amused me, although they were not novel. But after a while I grew tired of listening, yet I listened still, agreeing with him,

and leading him on to let him have his fill of talk, always hoping that he would come at last to speak of personal matters and give me an account of his history and of Rima's origin. But the hope proved vain; not a word to enlighten me would he drop, however cunningly I tempted him.

"So be it," thought I; "but if you are cunning, old man, I shall be cunning too—and patient; for all things come to him who waits."

He was in no hurry to get rid of me. On the contrary, he more than hinted that I would be safer under his roof than with the Indians, at the same time apologising for not giving me meat to eat.

"But why do you not have meat? Never have I seen animals so abundant and tame as in this wood."

Before he could reply Rima, with a jug of water from the spring in her hand, came in: glancing at me he lifted his finger to signify that such a subject must not be discussed in her presence; but as soon as she quitted the room he returned to it.

"Señor," he said, "have you forgotten your adventure with the snake? Know, then, that my grandchild would not live with me for one day longer if I were to lift my hand against any living creature. For us, señor, every day is fast-day—only without the fish. We have maize, pumpkin, cassava, potatoes, and these suffice. And even of these cultivated fruits of the earth she eats but little in the house, preferring certain wild berries and gums, which are more to her taste, and which she picks here and there in her rambles in the wood. And I, sir, loving

her as I do, whatever my inclination may be, shed no blood and eat no flesh."

I looked at him with an incredulous smile.

"And your dogs, old man?"

"My dogs? Sir, they would not pause or turn aside if a coatimundi crossed their path—an animal with a strong odour. As a man is, so is his dog. Have you not seen dogs eating grass, sir, even in Venezuela, where these sentiments do not prevail? And when there is no meat—when meat is forbidden—these sagacious animals accustom themselves to a vegetable diet."

I could not very well tell the old man that he was lying to me—that would have been bad policy—and so I passed it off. "I have no doubt that you are right," I said. "I have heard that there are dogs in China that eat no meat, but are themselves eaten by their owners after being fattened on rice. I should not care to dine on one of your animals, old man."

He looked at them critically and replied, "Certainly they are lean."

"I was thinking less of their leanness than of their smell," I returned. "Their odour when they approach me is not flowery, but resembles that of other dogs which feed on flesh, and have offended my too sensitive nostrils even in the drawing-rooms of Caracas. It is not like the fragrance of cattle when they return from the pasture."

"Every animal," he replied, "gives out that odour which is peculiar to its kind"; an incontrovertible fact which left me nothing to say.

When I had sufficiently recovered the suppleness of my limbs to walk with ease I went for a ramble in the wood, in the hope that Rima would accompany me, and that out among the trees she would cast aside that artificial constraint and shyness which was her manner in the house.

It fell out just as I had expected: she accompanied me in the sense of being always near me, or within earshot, and her manner was now free and unconstrained as I could wish; but little or nothing was gained by the change. She was once more the tantalising, elusive, mysterious creature I had first known through her wandering, melodious voice. The only difference was that the musical, inarticulate sounds were now less often heard, and that she was no longer afraid to show herself to me. This for a short time was enough to make me happy, since no lovelier being was ever looked upon, nor one whose loveliness was less likely to lose its charm through being often seen.

But to keep her near me or always in sight was, I found, impossible: she would be free as the wind, free as the butterfly, going and coming at her wayward will, and losing herself from sight a dozen times every hour. To induce her to walk soberly at my side or sit down and enter into conversation with me seemed about as impracticable as to tame the fiery-hearted little hummingbird that flashes into sight, remains suspended motionless for a few seconds before your face, then, quick as lightning, vanishes again.

At length, feeling convinced that she was most happy

when she had me out following her in the wood, that in spite of her bird-like wildness she had a tender, human heart, which was easily moved, I determined to try to draw her closer by means of a little innocent stratagem. Going out in the morning, after calling her several times to no purpose, I began to assume a downcast manner, as if suffering pain or depressed with grief; and at last, finding a convenient exposed root under a tree, on a spot where the ground was dry and strewn with loose yellow sand, I sat down and refused to go any further. For she always wanted to lead me on and on, and whenever I paused she would return to show herself, or to chide or encourage me in her mysterious language. All her pretty little arts were now practised in vain: with cheek resting on my hand I still sat, my eyes fixed on that patch of yellow sand at my feet, watching how the small particles glinted like diamond dust when the sunlight touched them. A full hour passed in this way, during which I encouraged myself by saying mentally: "This is a contest between us, and the most patient and the strongest of will, which should be the man, must conquer. And if I win on this occasion it will be easier for me in the future—easier to discover those things which I am resolved to know, and the girl must reveal to me, since the old man has proved impracticable."

Meanwhile she came and went and came again; and at last, finding that I was not to be moved, she approached and stood near me. Her face, when I glanced at it, had a somewhat troubled look—both troubled and curious.

"Come here, Rima," I said, "and stay with me for a little while—I cannot follow you now."

She took one or two hesitating steps, then stood still again; and at length, slowly and reluctantly, advanced to within a yard of me. Then I rose from my seat on the root, so as to catch her face better, and placed my hand against the rough bark of the tree.

"Rima," I said, speaking in a low, caressing tone, "will you stay with me here a little while and talk to me, not in your language, but in mine, so that I may understand? Will you listen when I speak to you, and answer me?"

Her lips moved, but made no sound. She seemed strangely disquieted, and shook back her loose hair, and with her small toes moved the sparkling sand at her feet, and once or twice her eyes glanced shyly at my face.

"Rima, you have not answered me," I persisted. "Will you not say 'yes'?"

"Yes."

"Where does your grandfather spend his day when he goes out with his dogs?"

She shook her head slightly, but would not speak.

"Have you no mother, Rima? Do you remember your mother?"

"My mother! My mother!" she exclaimed in a low voice, but with a sudden, wonderful animation. Bending a little nearer she continued: "Oh, she is dead! Her body is in the earth and turned to dust. Like that," and she moved the loose sand with her foot. "Her soul is up there, where the stars and the angels are, grandfather

says. But what is that to me? I am here—am I not? I talk to her just the same. Everything I see I point out, and tell her everything. In the daytime—in the woods, when we are together. And at night when I lie down I cross my arms on my breast—so, and say, 'Mother, mother, now you are in my arms; let us go to sleep together.' Sometimes I say, 'Oh, why will you never answer me when I speak and speak?' Mother—mother—mother!"

At the end her voice suddenly rose to a mournful cry, then sunk, and at the last repetition of the word died to a low whisper.

"Ah, poor Rima! she is dead and cannot speak to you—cannot hear you! Talk to me, Rima; I am living and can answer."

But now the cloud, which had suddenly lifted from her heart, letting me see for a moment into its mysterious depths—its fancies so childlike and feelings so intense—had fallen again; and my words brought no response, except a return of that troubled look to her face.

"Silent still?" I said. "Talk to me, then, of your mother, Rima. Do you know that you will see her again some day?"

"Yes, when I die. That is what the priest said."

"The priest?"

"Yes, at Voa—do you know? Mother died there when I was small—it is so far away! And there are thirteen houses by the side of the river—just here; and on this other side—trees, trees."

This was important, I thought, and would lead to the

very knowledge I wished for; so I pressed her to tell me more about the settlement she had named, and of which I had never heard.

"Everything have I told you," she returned, surprised that I did not know that she had exhausted the subject in those half-dozen words she had spoken.

Obliged to shift my ground, I said at a venture: "Tell me, what do you ask of the Virgin Mother when you kneel before her picture? Your grandfather told me that you had a picture in your little room."

"You know!" flashed out her answer, with something like resentment. "It is all there—in there," waving her hand towards the hut. "Out here in the wood it is all gone—like this," and stooping quickly she raised a little yellow sand on her palm, then let it run away through her fingers.

Thus she illustrated how all the matters she had been taught slipped from her mind when she was out-of-doors, out of sight of the picture. After an interval she added, "Only mother is here—always with me."

"Ah, poor Rima!" I said; "alone without a mother, and only your old grandfather! He is old—what will you do when he dies and flies away to the starry country where your mother is?"

She looked inquiringly at me, then made answer in a low voice, "You are here."

"But when I go away?"

She was silent; and not wishing to dwell on a subject that seemed to pain her, I continued: "Yes, I am here now, but you will not stay with me and talk freely.

Will it always be the same if I remain with you? Why are you always so silent in the house, so cold with your old grandfather? So different—so full of life, like a bird, when you are alone in the woods? Rima, speak to me! Am I no more to you than your old grandfather? Do you not like me to talk to you?"

She appeared strangely disturbed at my words. "Oh, you are not like him," she suddenly replied. "Sitting all day on a log by the fire—all day, all day; Goloso and Susio lying beside him—sleep, sleep. Oh, when I saw you in the wood I followed you, and talked and talked; still no answer. Why will you not come when I call? To me!" Then, mocking my voice, "Rima, Rima! Come here! Do this! Say that! Rima! Rima! It is nothing, nothing—it is not you," pointing to my mouth; and then, as if fearing that her meaning had not been made clear, suddenly touching my lips with her finger. "Why do you not answer me?—speak to me—speak to me, like this!" And turning a little more towards me, and glancing at me with eyes that had all at once changed, losing their clouded expression for one of exquisite tenderness, from her lips came a succession of those mysterious sounds which had first attracted me to her, swift and low and bird-like, yet with something so much higher and more soul-penetrating than any bird music. Ah, what feeling and fancies, what quaint turns of expression, unfamiliar to my mind, were contained in those sweet, wasted symbols! I could never know—never come to her when she called, or respond to her spirit. To me they would always be inarticulate sounds, affecting me like

a tender spiritual music—a language without words, suggesting more than words to the soul.

The mysterious speech died down to a lisping sound, like the faint note of some small bird falling from a cloud of foliage on the topmost bough of a tree; and at the same time that new light passed from her eyes, and she half averted her face in a disappointed way.

"Rima," I said at length, a new thought coming to my aid, "it is true that I am not here," touching my lips as she had done, "and that my words are nothing. But look into my eyes, and you will see me there—all, all that is in my heart."

"Oh, I know what I should see there!" she returned quickly.

"What would you see—tell me?"

"There is a little black ball in the middle of your eye; I should see myself in it no bigger than that," and she marked off about an eighth of her little finger-nail. "There is a pool in the wood, and I look down and see myself there. That is better. Just as large as I am—not small and black like a small, small fly." And after saying this a little disdainfully she moved away from my side and out into the sunshine; and then, half turning towards me, and glancing first at my face and then upwards, she raised her hand to call my attention to something there.

Far up, high as the tops of the tallest trees, a great blue-winged butterfly was passing across the open space with loitering flight. In a few moments it was gone over the trees; then she turned once more to me with a little

rippling sound of laughter—the first I had heard from her, and called, "Come, come!"

I was glad enough to go with her then; and for the next two hours we rambled together in the wood; that is, together in her way, for though always near she contrived to keep out of my sight most of the time. She was evidently now in a gay, frolicsome temper; again and again, when I looked closely into some wide-spreading bush, or peered behind a tree, when her calling voice had sounded, her rippling laughter would come to me from some other spot. At length, somewhere about the centre of the wood, she led me to an immense mora tree, growing almost isolated, covering with its shade a large space of ground entirely free from undergrowth. At this spot she all at once vanished from my side; and after listening and watching some time in vain I sat down beside the giant trunk to wait for her. Very soon I heard a low, warbling sound which seemed quite near.

"Rima! Rima!" I called, and instantly my call was repeated like an echo. Again and again I called, and still the words flew back to me, and I could not decide whether it was an echo or not. Then I gave up calling; and presently the low, warbling sound was repeated, and I knew that Rima was somewhere near me.

"Rima, where are you?" I called.

"Rima, where are you?" came the answer.

"You are behind the tree."

"You are behind the tree."

"I shall catch you, Rima." And this time, instead of repeating my words, she answered, "Oh no."

I jumped up and ran round the tree, feeling sure that I should find her. It was about thirty-five or forty feet in circumference; and after going round two or three times I turned and ran the other way, but failing to catch a glimpse of her I at last sat down again.

"Rima, Rima!" sounded the mocking voice as soon as I had sat down. "Where are you, Rima? I shall catch you, Rima! Have you caught Rima?"

"No, I have not caught her. There is no Rima now. She has faded away like a rainbow—like a drop of dew in the sun. I have lost her; I shall go to sleep." And stretching myself out at full length under the tree, I remained quiet for two or three minutes. Then a slight rustling sound was heard, and I looked eagerly round for her. But the sound was overhead and caused by a great avalanche of leaves which began to descend on to me from that vast leafy canopy above.

"Ah, little spider-monkey—little green tree-snake—you are there!" But there was no seeing her in that immense aerial palace hung with dim drapery of green and copper-coloured leaves. But how had she got there? Up the stupendous trunk even a monkey could not have climbed, and there were no lianas dropping to earth from the wide horizontal branches that I could see; but by-and-by, looking further away, I perceived that on one side the longest lower branches reached and mingled with the shorter boughs of the neighbouring trees. While gazing up I heard her low, rippling laugh, and then caught sight of her as she ran along an exposed horizontal branch, erect on her feet; and my heart stood still with terror, for she

was fifty to sixty feet above the ground. In another moment she vanished from sight in a cloud of foliage, and I saw no more of her for about ten minutes, when all at once she appeared at my side once more, having come round the trunk of the mora. Her face had a bright, pleased expression, and showed no trace of fatigue or agitation.

I caught her hand in mine. It was a delicate, shapely little hand, soft as velvet, and warm—a real human hand: only now when I held it did she seem altogether like a human being, and not a mocking spirit of the wood, a daughter of the Didi.

"Do you like me to hold your hand, Rima?"

"Yes," she replied, with indifference.

"Is it I?"

"Yes." This time as if it was small satisfaction to make acquaintance with this purely physical part of me.

Having her so close gave me an opportunity of examining that light sheeny garment she wore always in the woods. It felt soft and satiny to the touch, and there was no seam nor hem in it that I could see, but it was all in one piece, like the cocoon of the caterpillar. While I was feeling it on her shoulder and looking narrowly at it, she glanced at me with a mocking laugh in her eyes.

"Is it silk?" I asked. Then, as she remained silent, I continued, "Where did you get this dress, Rima? Did you make it yourself? Tell me."

She answered not in words, but in response to my question a new look came into her face; no longer restless and full of change in her expression, she was now a

immovable as an alabaster statue; not a siken hair on her head trembled; her eyes were wide open, gazing fixedly before her; and when I looked into them they seemed to see and yet not to see me. They were like the clear, brilliant eyes of a bird, which reflect as in a miraculous mirror all the visible world but do not return our look, and seem to see us merely as one of the thousand small details that make up the whole picture. Suddenly she darted out her hand like a flash, making me start at the unexpected motion, and quickly withdrawing it, held up a finger before me. From its tip a minute gossamer spider, about twice the bigness of a pin's head, appeared suspended from a fine, scarcely visible line three or four inches long.

"Look!" she exclaimed, with a bright glance at my face.

The small spider she had captured, anxious to be free, was falling, falling earthward, but could not reach the surface. Leaning her shoulder a little forward, she placed the finger-tip against it, but lightly, scarcely touching, and moving continuously, with a motion rapid as that of a fluttering moth's wing; while the spider, still paying out his line, remained suspended, rising and falling slightly at nearly the same distance from the ground. After a few moments she cried, "Drop down, little spider." Her finger's motion ceased, and the minute captive fell, to lose itself on the shaded ground.

"Do you not see?" she said to me, pointing to he shoulder. Just where the finger-tip had touched the garment a round shining spot appeared, looking like a

silver coin on the cloth; but on touching it with my finger it seemed part of the original fabric, only whiter and more shiny on the grey ground, on account of the freshness of the web of which it had just been made.

And so all this curious and pretty performance, which seemed instinctive in its spontaneous quickness and dexterity, was merely intended to show me how she made her garments out of the fine floating lines of small gossamer spiders!

Before I could express my surprise and admiration she cried again, with startling suddenness, "Look!"

A minute shadowy form darted by, appearing like a dim line traced across the deep glossy mora foliage, then on the lighter green foliage further away. She waved her hand in imitation of its swift, curving flight, then dropping it exclaimed, "Gone—oh, little thing!"

"What was it?" I asked, for it might have been a bird, a bird-like moth, or a bee.

"Did you not see? And you asked me to look into your eyes!"

"Ah, little squirrel Sakawinki, you remind me of that!" I said, passing my arm round her waist and drawing her a little closer. "Look into my eyes now and see if I am blind, and if there is nothing in them except an image of Rima like a small, small fly."

She shook her head and laughed a little mockingly, but made no effort to escape from my arm.

"Would you like me always to do what you wish, Rima—to follow you in the woods when you say 'Come' —to chase you round the tree to catch you, and lie down

for you to throw leaves on me, and to be glad when you are glad?"

"Oh yes."

"Then let us make a compact. I shall do everything to please you, and you must promise to do everything to please me."

"Tell me."

"Little things, Rima—none so hard as chasing you round a tree. Only to have you stand or sit by me and talk will make me happy. And to begin you must call me by my name—Abel."

"Is that your name? Oh, not your real name! Abel, Abel—what is that? It says nothing. I have called you by so many names—twenty, thirty—and no answer."

"Have you? But, dearest girl, every person has a name—one name he is called by. Your name, for instance, is Rima, is it not?"

"Rima! only Rima—to you? In the morning, in the evening . . . now in this place and in a little while where know I? . . . in the night when you wake and it is dark, dark, and you see me all the same. Only Rima—oh, how strange!"

"What else, sweet girl? Your grandfather Nuflo calls you Rima."

"Nuflo?" She spoke as if putting a question to herself. "Is that an old man with two dogs that lives somewhere in the wood?" And then, with sudden petulance, "And you ask me to talk to you!"

"Oh, Rima, what can I say to you? Listen——"

"No, no," she exclaimed, quickly turning and putting

her fingers on my mouth to stop my speech, while a sudden merry look shone in her eyes. "You shall listen when I speak, and do all I say. And tell me what to do to please you with your eyes—let me look in your eyes that are not blind."

She turned her face more towards me, and with head a little thrown back and inclined to one side, gazing now full into my eyes as I had wished her to do. After a few moments she glanced away to the distant trees. But I could see into those divine orbs, and knew that she was not looking at any particular object. All the ever-varying expressions—inquisitive, petulant, troubled, shy, frolicsome—had now vanished from the still face, and the look was inward and full of a strange, exquisite light, as if some new happiness or hope had touched her spirit.

Sinking my voice to a whisper I said, "Tell me what you have seen in my eyes, Rima?"

She murmured in reply something melodious and inarticulate, then glanced at my face in a questioning way; but only for a moment, then her sweet eyes were again veiled under those drooping lashes.

"Listen, Rima," I said. "Was that a humming-bird we saw a little while ago? You are like that, now dark, a shadow in the shadow, seen for an instant, and then—gone, oh, little thing! And now in the sunshine standing still, how beautiful!—a thousand times more beautiful than the humming-bird. Listen, Rima, you are like all beautiful things in the wood—flower, and bird, and butterfly, and green leaf, and frond, and little silky-haired monkey high up in the trees. When I look at you I see

them all—all and more, a thousand times, for I see Rima herself. And when I listen to Rima's voice, talking in a language I cannot understand, I hear the wind whispering in the leaves, the gurgling running water, the bee among the flowers, the organ-bird singing far, far away in the shadows of the trees. I hear them all, and more, for I hear Rima. Do you understand me now? Is it I speaking to you—have I answered you—have I come to you?"

She glanced at me again, her lips trembling, her eyes now clouded with some secret trouble. "Yes," she replied in a whisper, and then, "No, it is not you," and after a moment, doubtfully, "Is it you?"

But she did not wait to be answered: in a moment she was gone round the mora; nor would she return again for all my calling.

CHAPTER IX

THAT afternoon with Rima in the forest under the mora tree had proved so delightful that I was eager for more rambles and talks with her, but the variable little witch had a great surprise in store for me. All her wild natural gaiety had unaccountably gone out of her: when I walked in the shade she was there, but no longer as the blithe, fantastic being, bright as an angel, innocent and affectionate as a child, tricksy as a monkey, that had played at hide-and-seek with me. She was now my shy, silent attendant, only occasionally visible, and appearing then like the mysterious maid I had found reclining among the ferns who had melted away mist-like from sight as I gazed. When I called she would not now answer as formerly, but in response would appear in sight as if to assure me that I had not been forsaken; and after a few moments her grey shadowy form would once more vanish among the trees. The hope that as her confidence increased and she grew accustomed to talk with me she would be brought to reveal the story of her life had to be abandoned, at all events for the present. I must, after all, get my information from Nuflo, or rest in ignorance. The old man was out for the greater part of each day with his dogs, and from

these expeditions he brought back nothing that I could see but a few nuts and fruits, some thin bark for his cigarettes, and an occasional handful of haima gum to perfume the hut of an evening. After I had wasted three days in vainly trying to overcome the girl's now inexplicable shyness, I resolved to give for a while my undivided attention to her grandfather to discover, if possible, where he went and how he spent his time.

My new game of hide-and-seek with Nuflo instead of with Rima began on the following morning. He was cunning: so was I. Going out and concealing myself among the bushes, I began to watch the hut. That I could elude Rima's keener eyes I doubted; but that did not trouble me. She was not in harmony with the old man, and would do nothing to defeat my plan. I had not been long in my hiding-place before he came out, followed by his two dogs, and going to some distance from the door he sat down on a log. For some minutes he smoked, then rose, and after looking cautiously round slipped away among the trees. I saw that he was going off in the direction of the low range of rocky hills south of the forest. I knew that the forest did not extend far in that direction, and thinking that I should be able to catch a sight of him on its borders, I left the bushes and ran through the trees as fast as I could to get ahead of him. Coming to where the wood was very open, I found that a barren plain beyond it, a quarter of a mile wide, separated it from the range of hills; thinking that the old man might cross this open space I climbed into a tree to watch. After some time he appeared, walking

rapidly among the trees, the dogs at his heels, but not going towards the open plain; he had, it seemed, after arriving at the edge of the wood, changed his direction, and was going west, still keeping in the shelter of the trees. When he had been gone about five minutes I dropped to the ground and started in pursuit; once more I caught sight of him through the trees, and I kept him in sight for about twenty minutes longer; then he came to a broad strip of dense wood which extended into and through the range of hills, and here I quickly lost him. Hoping still to overtake him, I pushed on, but after struggling through the underwood for some distance, and finding the forest growing more difficult as I progressed, I at last gave him up. Turning eastward I got out of the wood to find myself at the foot of a steep rough hill, one of the range which the wooded valley cut through at right angles. It struck me that it would be a good plan to climb the hill to get a view of the forest belt in which I had lost the old man; and after walking a short distance I found a spot which allowed of an ascent. The summit of the hill was about three hundred feet above the surrounding level, and did not take me long to reach; it commanded a fair view, and I now saw that the belt of wood beneath me extended right through the range, and on the south side opened out into an extensive forest. "If that is your destination," thought I, "old fox, your secrets are safe from me."

It was still early in the day, and a slight breeze tempered the air and made it cool and pleasant on the hilltop after my exertions. My scramble through the

wood had fatigued me somewhat, and resolving to spend some hours on that spot, I looked round for a comfortable resting-place. I soon found a shady spot on the west side of an upright block of stone where I could recline at ease on a bed of lichen. Here, with shoulders resting against the rock, I sat thinking of Rima, alone in her wood to-day, with just a tinge of bitterness in my thoughts which made me hope that she would miss me as much as I missed her; and in the end I fell asleep.

When I woke it was past noon, and the sun was shining directly on me. Standing up to gaze once more on the prospect, I noticed a small wreath of white smoke issuing from a spot about the middle of the forest belt beneath me, and I instantly divined that Nuflo had made a fire at that place, and I resolved to surprise him in his retreat. When I got down to the base of the hill the smoke could no longer be seen, but I had studied the spot well from above, and had singled out a large clump of trees on the edge of the belt as a starting-point; and after a search of half an hour I succeeded in finding the old man's hiding-place. First I saw smoke again through an opening in the trees, then a small rude hut of sticks and palm-leaves. Approaching cautiously, I peered through a crack and discovered old Nuflo engaged in smoking some meat over a fire, and at the same time grilling some bones on the coals. He had captured a coatimundi, an animal somewhat larger than a tame tom cat, with a long snout and long ringed tail: one of the dogs was gnawing at the animal's head, and the tail and the feet were also lying on the floor, among the old bones and rubbish that littered

it. Stealing round I suddenly presented myself at the opening to his den, when the dogs rose up with a growl and Nuflo instantly leaped to his feet, knife in hand.

"Aha, old man," I cried, with a laugh, "I have found you at one of your vegetarian repasts; and your grass-eating dogs as well!"

He was disconcerted and suspicious, but when I explained that I had seen a smoke while on the hills, where I had gone to search for a curious blue flower which grew in such places, and had made my way to it to discover the cause, he recovered confidence and invited me to join him at his dinner of roast meat.

I was hungry by this time and not sorry to get animal food once more; nevertheless, I ate this meat with some disgust, as it had a rank taste and smell, and it was also unpleasant to have those evil-looking dogs savagely gnawing at the animal's head and feet at the same time.

"You see," said the old hypocrite, wiping the grease from his moustache, "this is what I am compelled to do in order to avoid giving offence. My granddaughter is a strange being, sir, as you have perhaps observed——"

"That reminds me," I interrupted, "that I wish you to relate her history to me. She is, as you say, strange, and has speech and faculties unlike ours, which shows that she comes of a different race."

"No, no, her faculties are not different from ours. They are sharper, that is all. It pleases the All-Powerful to give more to some than to others. Not all the fingers on the hand are alike. You will find a man who will take up a guitar and make it speak, while I——"

"All that I understand," I broke in again. "But her origin, her history—that is what I wish to hear."

"And that, sir, is precisely what I am about to relate. Poor child, she was left on my hands by her sainted mother—my daughter, sir—who perished young. Now her birthplace, where she was taught letters and the Catechism by the priest, was in an unhealthy situation. It was hot and wet—always wet—a place suited to frogs rather than to human beings. At length, thinking that it would suit the child better—for she was pale and weakly—to live in a drier atmosphere among mountains, I brought her to this district. For this, señor, and for all I have done for her, I look for no reward here, but to that place where my daughter has got her foot; not, sir, on the threshold, as you might think, but well inside. For, after all, it is to the authorities above, in spite of some blots which we see in their administration, that we must look for justice. Frankly, sir, this is the whole story of my granddaughter's origin."

"Ah, yes," I returned, "your story explains why she can call a wild bird to her hand, and touch a venomous serpent with her bare foot and receive no harm."

"Doubtless you are right," said the old dissembler. "Living alone in the wood she had only God's creatures to play and make friends with; and wild animals, I have heard it said, know those who are friendly towards them."

"You treat her friends badly," said I, kicking the long tail of the coatimundi away with my foot, and regretting that I had joined him in his repast.

"Señor, you must consider that we are only what Heaven made us. When all this was formed," he continued, opening his arms wide to indicate the entire creation, "the Person who concerned himself with this matter gave seeds and fruitlets and nectar of flowers for the sustentation of His small birds. But we have not their delicate appetites. The more robust stomach which he gave to man cries out for meat. Do you understand? But of all this, friend, not one word to Rima!"

I laughed scornfully. "Do you think me such a child, old man, as to believe that Rima, that little sprite, does not know that you are an eater of flesh? Rima, who is everywhere in the wood, seeing all things, even if I lift my hand against a serpent, she herself unseen."

"But, sir, if you will pardon my presumption, you are saying too much. She does not come here, and therefore cannot see that I eat meat. In all that wood where she flourishes and sings, where she is in her house and garden, and mistress of the creatures, even of the small butterfly with painted wings, there, sir, I hunt no animal. Nor will my dogs chase any animal there. That is what I meant when I said that if an animal should stumble against their legs, they would lift up their noses and pass on without seeing it. For in that wood there is one law, the law that Rima imposes, and outside of it a different law."

"I am glad that you have told me this," I replied. "The thought that Rima might be near, and, unseen herself, look in upon us feeding with the dogs and, like dogs, on flesh, was one which greatly troubled my mind."

He glanced at me in his usual quick, cunning way.

"Ah, señor, you have that feeling too—after so short a time with us! Consider, then, what it must be for me, unable to nourish myself on gums and fruitlets, and that little sweetness made by wasps out of flowers, when I am compelled to go far away and eat secretly to avoid giving offence."

It was hard, no doubt, but I did not pity him; secretly I could only feel anger against him for refusing to enlighten me, while making such a pretence of openness; and I also felt disgusted with myself for having joined him in his rank repast. But dissimulation was necessary, and so, after conversing a little more on indifferent topics, and thanking him for his hospitality, I left him alone to go on with his smoky task.

On my way back to the lodge, fearing that some taint of Nuflo's evil-smelling den and dinner might still cling to me, I turned aside to where a streamlet in the wood widened and formed a deep pool, to take a plunge in the water. After drying myself in the air, and thoroughly ventilating my garments by shaking and beating them, I found an open, shady spot in the wood and threw myself on the grass to wait for evening before returning to the house. By that time the sweet, warm air would have purified me. Besides, I did not consider that I had sufficiently punished Rima for her treatment of me. She would be anxious for my safety, perhaps even looking for me everywhere in the wood. It was not much to make her suffer one day after she had made me miserable for three; and perhaps when she discovered that I could

exist without her society she would begin to treat me less capriciously.

So ran my thoughts as I rested on the warm ground, gazing up into the foliage, green as young grass in the lower, shady parts, and above luminous with the bright sunlight, and full of the murmuring sounds of insect life. My every action, word, thought, had my feeling for Rima as a motive. Why, I began to ask myself, was Rima so much to me? It was easy to answer that question: Because nothing so exquisite had ever been created. All the separate and fragmentary beauty and melody and graceful motion found scattered throughout nature were concentrated and harmoniously combined in her. How various, how luminous, how divine she was! A being for the mind to marvel at, to admire continually, finding some new grace and charm every hour, every moment, to add to the old. And there was, besides, the fascinating mystery surrounding her origin to arouse and keep my interest in her continually active.

That was the easy answer I returned to the question I had asked myself. But I knew that there was another answer—a reason more powerful than the first. And I could no longer thrust it back, or hide its shining face with the dull, leaden mask of mere intellectual curiosity. *Because I loved her;* loved her as I had never loved before, never could love any other being, with a passion which had caught something of her own brilliance and intensity, making a former passion look dim and commonplace in comparison—a feeling known to everyone, something old and worn out, a weariness even to think of.

From these reflections I was roused by the plaintive

three-syllabled call of an evening bird—a nightjar common in these woods; and was surprised to find that the sun had set, and the woods already shadowed with the twilight. I started up and began hurriedly walking homewards, thinking of Rima, and was consumed with impatience to see her; and as I drew near to the house, walking along a narrow path which I knew, I suddenly met her face to face. Doubtless she had heard my approach, and instead of shrinking out of the path and allowing me to pass on without seeing her, as she would have done on the previous day, she had sprung forward to meet me. I was struck with wonder at the change in her as she came with a swift, easy motion, like a flying bird, her hands outstretched as if to clasp mine, her lips parted in a radiant, welcoming smile, her eyes sparkling with joy.

I started forward to meet her, but had no sooner touched her hands than her countenance changed, and she shrunk back trembling, as if the touch had chilled her warm blood; and moving some feet away, she stood with downcast eyes, pale and sorrowful as she had seemed yesterday. In vain I implored her to tell me the cause of this change and of the trouble she evidently felt; her lips trembled as if with speech, but she made no reply, and only shrunk further away when I attempted to approach her; and at length, moving aside from the path, she was lost to sight in the dusky leafage.

I went on alone, and sat outside for some time, until old Nuflo returned from his hunting; and only after he had gone in and had made the fire burn up did Rima make her appearance, silent and constrained as ever

CHAPTER X

ON the following day Rima continued in the same inexplicable humour; and feeling my defeat keenly, I determined once more to try the effect of absence on her, and to remain away on this occasion for a longer period. Like old Nufio, I was secret in going forth next morning, waiting until the girl was out of the way, then slipping off among the bushes into the deeper wood; and finally quitting its shelter I set out across the savannah towards my old quarters. Great was my surprise on arriving at the village to find no person there. At first I imagined that my disappearance in the forest of evil fame had caused them to abandon their home in a panic; but on looking round I concluded that my friends had only gone on one of their periodical visits to some neighbouring village. For when these Indians visit their neighbours they do it in a very thorough manner; they all go, taking with them their entire stock of provisions, their cooking utensils, weapons, hammocks, and even their pet animals. Fortunately in this case they had not taken quite everything; my hammock was there, also one small pot, some cassava bread, purple potatoes, and a few ears of maize. I concluded that these had been left for me in the event of my return; also that they had not been gone very many

hours, since a log of wood buried under the ashes of the hearth was still alight. Now as their absences from home usually last many days, it was plain that I would have the big naked barn-like house to myself for as long as I thought proper to remain, with little food to eat; but the prospect did not disturb me, and I resolved to amuse myself with music. In vain I hunted for my guitar; the Indians had taken it to delight their friends by twanging its strings. At odd moments during the last day or two I had been composing a simple melody in my brain, fitting it to ancient words; and now, without an instrument to assist me, I began softly singing to myself:—

Muy mas clara que la luna
Sola una
en el mundo vos nacistes.

After music I made up the fire and parched an ear of maize for my dinner, and while laboriously crunching the dry hard grain I thanked Heaven for having bestowed on me such good molars. Finally, I slung my hammock in its old corner, and placing myself in it in my favourite oblique position, my hands clasped behind my head, one knee cocked up, the other leg dangling down, I resigned myself to idle thought. I felt very happy. How strange, thought I, with a little self-flattery, that I, accustomed to the agreeable society of intelligent men and charming women, and of books, should find such perfect contentment here! But I congratulated myself too soon. The profound silence began at length to oppress me. It was not like the forest, where one has wild birds for company,

where their cries, albeit inarticulate, have a meaning and give a charm to solitude. Even the sight and whispered sounds of green leaves and rushes trembling in the wind have for us something of intelligence and sympathy; but I could not commune with mud walls and an earthen pot. Feeling my loneliness too acutely, I began to regret that I had left Rima, then to feel remorse at the secrecy I had practised. Even now, while I reclined idly in my hammock, she would be roaming the forest in search of me, listening for my footsteps, fearing perhaps that I had met with some accident where there was no person to succour me. It was painful to think of her in this way, of the pain I had doubtless given her by stealing off without a word of warning. Springing to the floor, I flung out of the house and went down to the stream. It was better there, for now the greatest heat of the day was over, and the westering sun began to look large, and red, and rayless through the afternoon haze.

I seated myself on a stone within a yard or two of the limpid water: and now the sight of nature and the warm, vital air and sunshine infected my spirit, and made it possible for me to face the position calmly, even hopefully. The position was this: for some days the idea had been present in my mind, and was now fixed there, that this desert was to be my permanent home. The thought of going back to Caracas, that little Paris in America, with its old-world vices, its idle political passions, its empty round of gaieties, was unendurable. I was changed, and this change—so great, so complete—was proof that the old artificial life had not been and could not be the real one,

in harmony with my deeper and truer nature. I deceived myself, you will say, as I have often myself said. I had and I had not. It is too long a question to discuss here, but just then I felt that I had quitted the hot, tainted atmosphere of the ballroom, that the morning air of heaven refreshed and elevated me, and was sweet to breathe. Friends and relations I had who were dear to me; but I could forget them, even as I could forget the splendid dreams which had been mine. And the woman I had loved, and who had perhaps loved me in return—I could forget her too. A daughter of civilisation and of that artificial life, she could never experience such feelings as these and return to nature as I was doing. For women, though within narrow limits more plastic than men, are yet without that larger adaptiveness which can take us back to the sources of life, which they have left eternally behind. Better, far better for both of us that she should wait through the long, slow months, growing sick at heart with hope deferred; that, seeing me no more, she should weep my loss, and be healed at last by time, and find love and happiness again in the old way, in the old place.

And while I thus sat thinking, sadly enough, but not despondingly, of past and present and future, all at once on the warm, still air came the resonant, far-reaching *kling-klang* of the campanero from some leafy summit half a league away. *Kling-klang* fell the sound again, and often again, at intervals, affecting me strangely at that moment, so bell-like, so like the great wide-travelling sounds associated in our minds with Christian worship. And yet so unlike. A bell, yet not made of gross metal

dug out of earth, but of an ethereal, sublimer material that floats impalpable and invisible in space—a vital bell suspended on nothing, giving out sounds in harmony with the vastness of blue heaven, the unsullied purity of nature, the glory of the sun, and conveying a mystic, a higher message to the soul than the sounds that surge from tower and belfry.

O mystic bell-bird of the heavenly race of the swallow and dove, the quetzal and the nightingale! When the brutish savage and the brutish white man that slay thee, one for food, the other for the benefit of science, shall have passed away, live still, live to tell thy message to the blameless spiritualised race that shall come after us to possess the earth, not for a thousand years, but for ever; for how much shall thy voice be to our clarified successors when even to my dull, unpurged soul, thou canst speak such high things, and bring it a sense of an impersonal, all-comprising One who is in me and I in him, flesh of his flesh and soul of his soul.

The sounds ceased, but I was still in that exalted mood, and, like a person in a trance, staring fixedly before me into the open wood of scattered dwarf trees on the other side of the stream, when suddenly on the field of vision appeared a grotesque human figure moving towards me. I started violently, astonished and a little alarmed, but in a very few moments I recognised the ancient Cla-cla, coming home with a large bundle of dry sticks on her shoulders, bent almost double under the burden, and still ignorant of my presence. Slowly she came down to the stream, then cautiously made her way over the line of

stepping-stones by which it was crossed; and only when within ten yards did the old creature catch sight of me sitting silent and motionless in her path. With a sharp cry of amazement and terror she straightened herself up, the bundle of sticks dropping to the ground, and turned to run from me. That, at all events, seemed her intention, for her body was thrown forward, and her head and arms working like those of a person going at full speed, but her legs seemed paralysed and her feet remained planted on the same spot. I burst out laughing; whereat she twisted her neck until her wrinkled, brown old face appeared over her shoulder staring at me. This made me laugh again, whereupon she straightened herself up once more and turned round to have a good look at me.

"Come, Cla-cla," I cried; "can you not see that I am a living man and no spirit? I thought no one had remained behind to keep me company and give me food. Why are you not with the others?"

"Ah, why!" she returned tragically. And then deliberately turning from me and assuming a most unladylike attitude, she slapped herself vigorously on the small of the back, exclaiming, "Because of my pain here!"

As she continued in that position with her back towards me for some time, I laughed once more and begged her to explain.

Slowly she turned round and advanced cautiously towards me, staring at me all the time. Finally, still eyeing me suspiciously, she related that the others had all gone on a visit to a distant village, she starting with

them: that after going some distance a pain had attacked her in her hind quarters, so sudden and acute that it had instantly brought her to a full stop; and to illustrate how full the stop was she allowed herself to go down, very unnecessarily, with a flop to the ground. But she no sooner touched the ground than up she started to her feet again, with an alarmed look on her owlish face, as if she had sat down on a stinging-nettle.

"We thought you were dead," she remarked, still thinking that I might be a ghost after all.

"No, still alive," I said. "And so because you came to the ground with your pain they left you behind! Well, never mind, Cla-cla, we are two now and must try to be happy together."

By this time she had recovered from her fear and began to feel highly pleased at my return, only lamenting that she had no meat to give me. She was anxious to hear my adventures, and the reason of my long absence. I had no wish to gratify her curiosity, with the truth at all events, knowing very well that with regard to the daughter of the Didi her feelings were as purely savage and malignant as those of Kua-kò. But it was necessary to say something, and, fortifying myself with the good old Spanish notion that lies told to the heathen are not recorded, I related that a venomous serpent had bitten me; after which a terrible thunderstorm had surprised me in the forest, and night coming on prevented my escape from it; then, next day, remembering that he who is bitten by a serpent dies, and not wishing to distress my friends with the sight of my dissolution, I elected to

remain, sitting there in the wood, amusing myself by singing songs and smoking cigarettes; and after several days and nights had gone by, finding that I was not going to die after all, and beginning to feel hungry, I got up and came back.

Old Cla-cla looked very serious, shaking and nodding her head a great deal, muttering to herself; finally, she gave it as her opinion that nothing ever would or could kill me; but whether my story had been believed or not she only knew.

I spent an amusing evening with my old savage hostess. She had thrown off her ailments, and pleased at having a companion in her dreary solitude, she was good-tempered and talkative, and much more inclined to laugh than when the others were present, when she was on her dignity.

We sat by the fire, cooking such food as we had, and talked and smoked; then I sang her songs in Spanish with that melody of my own—

Muy mas clara que la luna;

and she rewarded me by emitting a barbarous chant in a shrill, screechy voice; and, finally, starting up, I danced for her benefit polka, mazurka, and valse, whistling and singing to my motions.

More than once during the evening she tried to introduce serious subjects, telling me that I must always live with them, learn to shoot the birds and catch the fishes, and have a wife; and then she would speak of her granddaughter Oolava, whose virtues it was proper to mention.

but whose physical charms needed no description since they had never been concealed. Each time she got on this topic I cut her short, vowing that if I ever married she only should be my wife. She informed me that she was old and past her fruitful period: that not much longer would she make cassava-bread, and blow the fire to a flame with her wheezy old bellows, and talk the men to sleep at night. But I stuck to it that she was young and beautiful, that our descendants would be more numerous than the birds in the forest. I went out to some bushes close by, where I had noticed a passion plant in bloom, and gathering a few splendid scarlet blossoms with their stems and leaves, I brought them in and wove them into a garland for the old dame's head; then I pulled her up, in spite of screams and struggles, and waltzed her wildly to the other end of the room and back again to her seat beside the fire. And as she sat there, panting and grinning with laughter, I knelt before her, and with suitable passionate gestures, declaimed again the old delicate lines sung by Mena before Columbus sailed the seas:—

Muy mas clara que la luna
Sola una
en el mundo vos nacistes
tan gentil, que no vecistes
ni tuvistes
competidora ninguna
Desdi niñez en la cuna
cobrastes fama, beldad,
con tanta graciosidad,
que vos dotó la fortuna.

Thinking of another all the time! O poor old Cla-cla, knowing not what the jingle meant nor the secret of my wild happiness, now when I recall you sitting there, your old grey owlish head crowned with scarlet passion flowers, flushed with firelight, against the background of smoke-blackened walls and rafters, how the old undying sorrow comes back to me!

Thus our evening was spent, merrily enough; then we made up the fire with hard wood that would last all night, and went to our hammocks, but wakeful still. The old dame, glad and proud to be on duty once more, religiously went to work to talk me to sleep; but although I called out at intervals to encourage her to go on, I did not attempt to follow the ancient tales she told, which she had imbibed in childhood from other white-headed grandmothers long, long turned to dust. My own brain was busy thinking, thinking, thinking now of the woman I had once loved, far away in Venezuela, waiting and weeping and sick with hope deferred; now of Rima, wakeful and listening to the mysterious night-sounds of the forest—listening, listening for my returning footsteps.

Next morning I began to waver in my resolution to remain absent from Rima for some days: and before evening my passion, which I had now ceased to struggle against, coupled with the thought that I had acted unkindly in leaving her, that she would be a prey to anxiety, overcame me, and I was ready to return. The old woman, who had been suspiciously watching my movements, rushed out after me as I left the house,

crying out that a storm was brewing, that it was too late to go far, and night would be full of danger. I waved my hand in good-bye, laughingly reminding her that I was proof against all perils. Little she cared what evil might befall me, I thought; but she loved not to be alone; even for her, low down as she was intellectually, the solitary earthen pot had no "mind stuff" in it, and could not be sent to sleep at night with the legends of long ago.

By the time I reached the ridge I had discovered that she had prophesied truly, for now an ominous change had come over nature. A dull grey vapour had overspread the entire western half of the heavens; down, beyond the forest, the sky looked black as ink, and behind this blackness the sun had vanished. It was too late to go back now; I had been too long absent from Rima, and could only hope to reach Nuflo's lodge, wet or dry, before night closed round me in the forest.

For some moments I stood still on the ridge, struck by the somewhat weird aspect of the shadowed scene before me—the long strip of dull uniform green, with here and there a slender palm lifting its feathery crown above the other trees, standing motionless, in strange relief against the advancing blackness. Then I set out once more at a run, taking advantage of the downward slope to get well on my way before the tempest should burst. As I approached the wood there came a flash of lightning, pale, but covering the whole visible sky, followed after a long interval by a distant roll of thunder, which lasted several seconds, and ended with a succession of deep throbs. It was as if Nature herself, in supreme anguish and abandon-

ment, had cast herself prone on the earth, and her great heart had throbbed audibly, shaking the world with its beats. No more thunder followed, but the rain was coming down heavily now in huge drops that fell straight through the gloomy, windless air. In half a minute I was drenched to the skin; but for a short time the rain seemed an advantage, as the brightness of the falling water lessened the gloom, turning the air from dark to lighter grey. This subdued rain-light did not last long: I had not been twenty minutes in the wood before a second and greater darkness fell on the earth, accompanied by an even more copious downpour of water. The sun had evidently gone down, and the whole sky was now covered with one thick cloud. Becoming more nervous as the gloom increased, I bent my steps more to the south, so as to keep near the border and more open part of the wood. Probably I had already grown confused before deviating and turned the wrong way, for instead of finding the forest easier, it grew closer and more difficult as I advanced. Before many minutes the darkness so increased that I could no longer distinguish objects more than five feet from my eyes. Groping blindly along, I became entangled in a dense undergrowth, and after struggling and stumbling along for some distance in vain endeavours to get through it, I came to a stand at last in sheer despair. All sense of direction was now lost: I was entombed in thick blackness—blackness of night and cloud and rain and of dripping foliage and network of branches bound with bush-ropes and creepers in a wild tangle. I had struggled into a hollow, or hole, as it were,

in the midst of that mass of vegetation, where I could stand upright and turn round and round without touching anything; but when I put out my hands they came into contact with vines and bushes. To move from that spot seemed folly; yet how dreadful to remain there standing on the sodden earth, chilled with rain, in that awful blackness in which the only luminous thing one could look to see would be the eyes, shining with their own internal light, of some savage beast of prey. Yet the danger, the intense physical discomfort, and the anguish of looking forward to a whole night spent in that situation, stung my heart less than the thought of Rima's anxiety and of the pain I had carelessly given by secretly leaving her.

It was then, with that pang in my heart, that I was startled by hearing, close by, one of her own low, warbled expressions. There could be no mistake; if the forest had been full of the sounds of animal life and songs of melodious birds, her voice would have been instantly distinguished from all others. How mysterious, how infinitely tender it sounded in that awful blackness!—so musical and exquisitely modulated, so sorrowful, yet piercing my heart with a sudden, unutterable joy.

"Rima! Rima!" I cried. "Speak again. Is it you? Come to me here."

Again that low, warbling sound, or series of sounds, seemingly from a distance of a few yards. I was not disturbed at her not replying in Spanish: she had always spoken it somewhat reluctantly, and only when at my side; but when calling to me from some distance she would return instinctively to her own mysterious language,

and call to me as bird calls to bird. I knew that she was inviting me to follow her, but I refused to move.

"Rima," I cried again, "come to me here, for I know not where to step, and cannot move until you are at my side, and I can feel your hand."

There came no response, and after some moments, becoming alarmed, I called to her again.

Then close by me, in a low, trembling voice, she returned, "I am here."

I put out my hand and touched something soft and wet; it was her breast, and moving my hand higher up, I felt her hair, hanging now and streaming with water. She was trembling, and I thought the rain had chilled her.

"Rima—poor child! How wet you are! How strange to meet you in such a place! Tell me, dear Rima, how did you find me?"

"I was waiting—watching—all day. I saw you coming across the savannah, and followed at a distance through the wood."

"And I had treated you so unkindly! Ah, my guardian angel, my light in the darkness, how I hate myself for giving you pain! Tell me, sweet, did you wish me to come back and live with you again?"

She made no reply. Then, running my fingers down her arm, I took her hand in mine. It was hot, like the hand of one in a fever. I raised it to my lips, and then attempted to draw her to me, but she slipped down and out of my arms to my feet. I felt her there, on her knees, with head bowed low. Stooping and putting

my arm round her body, I drew her up and held her against my breast, and felt her heart throbbing wildly. With many endearing words I begged her to speak to me; but her only reply was, "Come—come," as she slipped again out of my arms, and holding my hand in hers, guided me through the bushes.

Before long we came to an open path or glade, where the darkness was not so profound; and releasing my hand she began walking rapidly before me, always keeping at such a distance as just enabled me to distinguish her grey, shadowy figure, and with frequent doublings to follow the natural paths and openings which she knew so well. In this way we kept on nearly to the end, without exchanging a word, and hearing no sound except the continuous rush of rain, which to our accustomed ears had ceased to have the effect of sound, and the various gurgling noises of innumerable runnels. All at once, as we came to a more open place, a strip of bright firelight appeared before us, shining from the half-open door of Nuflo's lodge. She turned round as much as to say, "Now you know where you are," then hurried on, leaving me to follow as best I could.

CHAPTER XI

THERE was a welcome change in the weather when I rose early next morning; the sky was now without cloud, and had that purity in its colour and look of infinite distance seen only when the atmosphere is free from vapour. The sun had not yet risen, but old Nuflo was already among the ashes, on his hands and knees, blowing the embers he had uncovered to a flame. Then Rima appeared only to pass through the room with quick light tread to go out of the door without a word or even a glance at my face. The old man, after watching at the door for a few minutes, turned and began eagerly questioning me about my adventures on the previous evening. In reply I related to him how the girl had found me in the forest lost and unable to extricate myself from the tangled undergrowth.

He rubbed his hands on his knees and chuckled. "Happy for you, señor," he said, "that my granddaughter regards you with such friendly eyes, otherwise you might have perished before morning. Once she was at your side, no light, whether of sun or moon or lantern, was needed, nor that small instrument which is said to guide a man aright in the desert, even in the darkest night—let him that can believe such a thing!"

"Yes, happy for me," I returned. "I am filled with remorse that it was all through my fault that the poor child was exposed to such weather."

"O señor," he cried airily, "let not that distress you! Rain and wind and hot suns, from which we seek shelter, do not harm her. She takes no cold, and no fever, with or without ague."

After some further conversation I left him to steal away unobserved on his own account, and set out for a ramble in the hope of encountering Rima and winning her to talk to me.

My quest did not succeed: not a glimpse of her delicate shadowy form did I catch among the trees; and not one note from her melodious lips came to gladden me. At noon I returned to the house, where I found food placed ready for me, and knew that she had come there during my absence and had not been forgetful of my wants. "Shall I thank you for this?" I said. "I ask you for heavenly nectar for the sustentation of the higher winged nature in me, and you give me a boiled sweet potato, toasted strips of sun-dried pumpkins, and a handful of parched maize! Rima! Rima! my woodland fairy, my sweet saviour, why do you yet fear me? Is it that love struggles in you with repugnance? Can you discern with clear spiritual eyes the grosser elements in me, and hate them; or has some false imagination made me appear all dark and evil, but too late for your peace, after the sweet sickness of love has infected you?"

But she was not there to answer me, and so after a time I went forth again and seated myself listlessly on the root

of an old tree not far from the house. I had sat there a full hour, when all at once Rima appeared at my side. Bending forward she touched my hand, but without glancing at my face; "Come with me," she said, and turning, moved swiftly towards the northern extremity of the forest. She seemed to take it for granted that I would follow, never casting a look behind, nor pausing in her rapid walk; but I was only too glad to obey, and starting up, was quickly after her. She led me by easy ways, familiar to her, with many doublings to escape the undergrowth, never speaking or pausing until we came out from the thick forest, and I found myself for the first time at the foot of the great hill or mountain Ytaioa. Glancing back for a few moments, she waved a hand towards the summit, and then at once began the ascent. Here too it seemed all familiar ground to her. From below the sides had presented an exceedingly rugged appearance—a wild confusion of huge jagged rocks, mixed with a tangled vegetation of trees, bushes, and vines; but following her in all her doublings it became easy enough, although it fatigued me greatly owing to our rapid pace. The hill was conical, but I found that it had a flat top; an oblong or pear-shaped area, almost level, of a soft, crumbly sandstone, with a few blocks and boulders of a harder stone scattered about; and no vegetation, except the grey mountain lichen and a few sere-looking dwarf shrubs.

Here Rima, at a distance of a few yards from me, remained standing still for some minutes, as if to give me time to recover my breath; and I was right glad to sit down on a stone to rest. Finally she walked slowly to the

centre of the level area, which was about two acres in extent; rising I followed her, and climbing on to a huge block of stone, began gazing at the wide prospect spread out before me. The day was windless and bright, with only a few white clouds floating at a great height above and casting travelling shadows over that wild, broken country, where forest, marsh, and savannah were only distinguishable by their different colours, like the greys and greens and yellows on a map. At a great distance the circle of the horizon was broken here and there by mountains, but the hills in our neighbourhood were all beneath our feet.

After gazing all round for some minutes, I jumped down from my stand, and leaning against the stone, stood watching the girl, waiting for her to speak. I felt convinced that she had something of the very highest importance (to herself) to communicate, and that only the pressing need of a confidant, not Nuflo, had overcome her shyness of me; and I determined to let her take her own time to say it in her own way. For a while she continued silent, her face averted, but her little movements and the way she clasped and unclasped her fingers showed that she was anxious and her mind working. Suddenly, half turning to me, she began speaking eagerly and rapidly.

"Do you see," she said, waving her hand to indicate the whole circuit of earth, "how large it is? Look!" pointing now to mountains in the west. "Those are the Vahanas —one, two, three—the highest—I can tell you their names—Vahana-Chara, Chumi, Aranoa. Do you see

that water? It is a river, called Guaypero. From the hills it comes down, Inaruna is their name, and you can see them over there in the south—far, far." And in this way she went on pointing out and naming all the mountains and rivers within sight. Then she suddenly dropped her hands to her sides, and continued, "That is all. Because we can see no further. But the world is larger than that! Other mountains, other rivers. Have I not told you of Voa, on the River Voa, where I was born, where mother died, where the priest taught me, years, years ago? All that you cannot see, it is so far away—so far."

I did not laugh at her simplicity, nor did I smile or feel any inclination to smile. On the contrary, I only experienced a sympathy so keen that it was like pain, while watching her clouded face, so changeful in its expression, yet in all changes so wistful. I could not yet form any idea as to what she wished to communicate or to discover, but seeing that she paused for a reply I answered, "The world is so large, Rima, that we can only see a very small portion of it from any one spot. Look at this," and with a stick I had used to aid me in my ascent I traced a circle six or seven inches in circumference on the soft stone and in its centre placed a small pebble. "This represents the mountain we are standing on," I continued, touching the pebble; "and this line encircling it encloses all of the earth we can see from the mountain-top. Do you understand?—the line I have traced is the blue line of the horizon beyond which we cannot see. And outside of this little circle is all the flat

top of Ytaioa representing the world. Consider, then, how small a portion of the world we can see from this spot!"

"And do you know it all?" she returned excitedly. "All the world?" waving her hand to indicate the little stone plain. "All the mountains, and rivers, and forests,—all the people in the world?"

"That would be impossible, Rima; consider how large it is."

"That does not matter. Come, let us go together—we two and grandfather, and see all the world; all the mountains and forests, and know all the people."

"You do not know what you are saying, Rima. You might as well say, 'Come, let us go to the sun and find out everything in it.'"

"It is you who do not know what you are saying," she retorted, with brightening eyes which for a moment glanced full into mine. "We have no wings like birds to fly to the sun. Am I not able to walk on the earth, and run? Can I not swim? Can I not climb every mountain?"

"No, you cannot. You imagine that all the earth is like this little portion you see. But it is not all the same. There are great rivers which you cannot cross by swimming; mountains you cannot climb; forests you cannot penetrate—dark, and inhabited by dangerous beasts, and so vast that all this space your eyes look on is a mere speck of earth in comparison."

She listened excitedly. "Oh, do you know all that?" she cried, with a strangely brightening look; and then

half turning from me, she added, with sudden petulance, 'Yet only a minute ago you knew nothing of the world —because it is so large! Is anything to be gained by speaking to one who says such contrary things?"

I explained that I had not contradicted myself, that she had not rightly interpreted my words. I knew, I said, something about the principal features of the different countries of the world, as, for instance, the largest mountain ranges, and rivers, and the cities. Also something, but very little, about the tribes of savage men. She heard me with impatience, which made me speak rapidly, in very general terms; and to simplify the matter I made the world stand for the continent we were in. It seemed idle to go beyond that, and her eagerness would not have allowed it.

"Tell me all you know," she said the moment I ceased speaking. "What is there—and there—and there?" pointing in various directions. "Rivers and forests—they are nothing to me. The villages, the tribes, the people everywhere; tell me, for I must know it all."

"It would take long to tell, Rima."

"Because you are so slow. Look how high the sun is! Speak, speak! What is there?" pointing to the north.

"All that country," I said, waving my hands from east to west, "is Guayana; and so large is it that you could go in this direction, or in this, travelling for months, without seeing the end of Guayana. Still it would be Guayana; rivers, rivers, rivers, with forests between, and other forests and rivers beyond. And savage people,

nations and tribes—Guahibo, Aguaricoto, Ayano, Maco, Piaroa, Quiriquiripo, Tuparito—shall I name a hundred more? It would be useless, Rima; they are all savages, and live widely scattered in the forests, hunting with bow and arrow and the zabatana. Consider, then, how large Guayana is!"

"Guayana—Guayana! Do I not know all this is Guayana? But beyond, and beyond, and beyond? Is there no end to Guayana?"

"Yes; there northwards it ends at the Orinoco, a mighty river, coming from mighty mountains, compared with which Ytaioa is like a stone on the ground on which we have sat down to rest. You must know that Guayana is only a portion, a half, of our country, Venezuela. Look," I continued, putting my hand round my shoulder to touch the middle of my back, "there is a groove running down my spine dividing my body into equal parts. Thus does the great Orinoco divide Venezuela, and on one side of it is all Guayana; and on the other side the countries or provinces of Cumana, Maturin, Barcelona, Bolivar, Guarico, Apure, and many others." I then gave a rapid description of the northern half of the country, with its vast llanos covered with herds in one part, its plantations of coffee, rice, and sugar-cane in another, and its chief towns; last of all Caracas, the gay and opulent little Paris in America.

This seemed to weary her; but the moment I ceased speaking, and before I could well moisten my dry lips, she demanded to know what came after Caracas—after all Venezuela.

"The ocean—water, water, water," I replied.

"There are no people there—in the water; only fishes," she remarked; then suddenly continued, "Why are you silent—is Venezuela, then, all the world?"

The task I had set myself to perform seemed only at its commencement yet. Thinking how to proceed with it my eyes roved over the level area we were standing on, and it struck me that this little irregular plain, broad at one end, and almost pointed at the other, roughly resembled the South American continent in its form.

"Look, Rima," I began, "here we are on this small pebble—Ytaioa; and this line round it shuts us in—we cannot see beyond. Now let us imagine that we can see beyond—that we can see the whole flat mountain-top; and that, you know, is the whole world. Now listen while I tell you of all the countries, and principal mountains, and rivers, and cities of the world."

The plan I had now fixed on involved a great deal of walking about and some hard work in moving and setting up stones and tracing boundary and other lines; but it gave me pleasure, for Rima was close by all the time, following me from place to place, listening to all I said in silence but with keen interest. At the broad end of the level summit I marked out Venezuela, showing by means of a long line how the Orinoco divided it, and also marking several of the greater streams flowing into it. I also marked the sites of Caracas and other large towns with stones; and rejoiced that we are not like the Europeans, great city builders, for the stones

proved heavy to lift. Then followed Colombia and Ecuador on the west; and, successively, Bolivia, Peru, Chili, ending at last in the south with Patagonia, a cold arid land, bleak and desolate. I marked the littoral cities as we progressed on that side, where earth ends and the Pacific Ocean begins, and infinitude.

Then, in a sudden burst of inspiration, I described the Cordilleras to her—that world-long, stupendous chain; its sea of Titicaca, and wintry, desolate Paramo, where lie the ruins of Tiahuanaco, older than Thebes. I mentioned its principal cities—those small inflamed or festering pimples that attract much attention from appearing on such a body. Quito, called—not in irony, but by its own people—the Splendid and the Magnificent; so high above the earth as to appear but a little way removed from heaven—"de Quito al cielo," as the saying is. But of its sublime history, its kings and conquerors, Haymar Capac the Mighty, and Huascar, and Atahualpa the Unhappy, not one word. Many words—how inadequate!—of the summits, white with everlasting snows, above it—above this navel of the world, above the earth, the ocean, the darkening tempest, the condor's flight. Flame-breathing Cotopaxi, whose wrathful mutterings are audible two hundred leagues away, and Chimborazo, Antisana, Sarata, Illimani, Aconcagua—names of mountains that affect us like the names of gods, implacable Pachacamac and Viracocha, whose everlasting granite thrones they are. At the last I showed her Cuzco, the city of the sun, and the highest dwelling-place of men on earth.

I was carried away by so sublime a theme; and re-

membering that I had no critical hearer, I gave free reins to fancy, forgetting for the moment that some undiscovered thought or feeling had prompted her questions. And while I spoke of the mountains she hung on my words, following me closely in my walk, her countenance brilliant, her frame quivering with excitement.

There yet remained to be described all that unimaginable space east of the Andes; the rivers—what rivers!—the green plains that are like the sea—the illimitable waste of water where there is no land—and the forest region. The very thought of the Amazonian forest made my spirit droop. If I could have snatched her up and placed her on the dome of Chimborazo she would have looked on an area of ten thousand square miles of earth, so vast is the horizon at that elevation. And possibly her imagination would have been able to clothe it all with an unbroken forest. Yet how small a portion this would be of the stupendous whole—of a forest region equal in extent to the whole of Europe! All loveliness, all grace, all majesty are there; but we cannot see, cannot conceive—come away! From this vast stage, to be occupied in the distant future by millions and myriads of beings, like us of upright form, the nations that will be born when all the existing dominant races on the globe and the civilisations they represent have perished as utterly as those who sculptured the stones of old Tiahuanaco—from this theatre of palms prepared for a drama unlike any which the Immortals have yet witnessed—I hurried away; and then slowly conducted her

along the Atlantic coast, listening to the thunder of its great waves, and pausing at intervals to survey some maritime city.

Never probably since old Father Noah divided the earth among his sons had so grand a geographical discourse been delivered; and having finished, I sat down, exhausted with my efforts, and mopped my brow, but glad that my huge task was over, and satisfied that I had convinced her of the futility of her wish to see the world for herself.

Her excitement had passed away by now. She was standing a little apart from me, her eyes cast down and thoughtful. At length she approached me and said, waving her hand all round, "What is beyond the mountains over there, beyond the cities on that side—beyond the world?"

"Water, only water. Did I not tell you?" I returned stoutly; for I had, of course, sunk the Isthmus of Panama beneath the sea.

"Water! All round?" she persisted.

"Yes."

"Water, and no beyond? Only water—always water?"

I could no longer adhere to so gross a lie. She was too intelligent, and I loved her too much. Standing up, I pointed to distant mountains and isolated peaks.

"Look at those peaks," I said. "It is like that with the world—this world we are standing on. Beyond that great water that flows all round the world, but far away, so far that it would take months in a big boat to reach them, there are islands, some small, others as large as

this world. But, Rima, they are so far away, so impossible to reach, that it is useless to speak or to think of them. They are to us like the sun and moon and stars, to which we cannot fly. And now sit down and rest by my side, for you know everything."

She glanced at me with troubled eyes.

"Nothing do I know—nothing have you told me. Did I not say that mountains and rivers and forests are nothing? Tell me about all the people in the world. Look! there is Cuzco over there, a city like no other in the world—did you not tell me so? Of the people nothing. Are they also different from all others in the world?"

"I will tell you that if you will first answer me one question, Rima."

She drew a little nearer, curious to hear, but was silent.

"Promise that you will answer me," I persisted, and as she continued silent I added, "Shall I not ask you, then?"

"Say," she murmured.

"Why do you wish to know about the people of Cuzco?"

She flashed a look at me, then averted her face. For some moments she stood hesitating, then coming closer, touched me on the shoulder, and said softly, "Turn away, do not look at me."

I obeyed, and bending so close that I felt her warm breath on my neck, she whispered, "Are the people in Cuzco like me? Would they understand me—the things you cannot understand? Do you know?"

Her tremulous voice betrayed her agitation, and her words, I imagined, revealed the motive of her action in bringing me to the summit of Ytaioa, and of her desire to visit and know all the various peoples inhabiting the world. She had begun to realise, after knowing me, her isolation and unlikeness to others, and at the same time to dream that all human beings might not be unlike her and unable to understand her mysterious speech and to enter into her thoughts and feelings.

"I can answer that question, Rima," I said. "Ah no, poor child, there are none there like you—not one, not one. Of all there—priests, soldiers, merchants, workmen, white, black, red, and mixed; men and women, old and young, rich and poor, ugly and beautiful—not one would understand the sweet language you speak."

She said nothing, and glancing round, I discovered that she was walking away, her fingers clasped before her, her eyes cast down, and looking profoundly dejected. Jumping up, I hurried after her. "Listen!" I said, coming to her side. "Do you know that there are others in the world like you who would understand your speech?"

"Oh, do I not! Yes—mother told me. I was young when you died, but, O mother, why did you not tell me more?"

"But where?"

"Oh, do you not think that I would go to them if I knew—that I would ask?"

"Does Nuflo know?"

She shook her head, walking dejectedly along.

"But have you asked him?" I persisted.

"Have I not! Not once—not a hundred times."

Suddenly she paused. "Look," she said, "now we are standing in Guayana again. And over there in Brazil, and up there towards the Cordilleras it is unknown. And there are people there. Come, let us go and seek for my mother's people in that place. With grandfather, but not the dogs; they would frighten the animals and betray us by barking to cruel men who would slay us with poisoned arrows."

"O Rima, can you not understand? It is too far. And your grandfather, poor old man, would die of weariness and hunger and old age in some strange forest."

"Would he die—old grandfather? Then we could cover him up with palm leaves in the forest and leave him. It would not be grandfather; only his body that must turn to dust. He would be away—away where the stars are. *We* should not die, but go on, and on, and on."

To continue the discussion seemed hopeless. I was silent, thinking of what I had heard—that there were others like her somewhere in that vast green world, so much of it imperfectly known, so many districts never yet explored by white men. True, it was strange that no report of such a race had reached the ears of any traveller; yet here was Rima herself at my side, a living proof that such a race did exist. Nuflo probably knew more than he would say; I had failed, as we have seen, to win the secret from him by fair means, and could not have recourse to foul—the rack and thumbscrew—to wring it from him. To the Indians she was only an object of superstitious fear—a daughter of the Didi—

and to them nothing of her origin was known. And she, poor girl, had only a vague remembrance of a few words heard in childhood from her mother, and probably not rightly understood.

While these thoughts had been passing through my mind Rima had been standing silent by, waiting, perhaps, for an answer to her last words. Then stooping, she picked up a small pebble and tossed it three or four yards away.

"Do you see where it fell?" she cried, turning towards me. "That is on the border of Guayana—is it not? Let us go there first."

"Rima, how you distress me! We cannot go there. It is all a savage wilderness, almost unknown to men—a blank on the map——"

"The map?—speak no word that I do not understand."

In a very few words I explained my meaning; even fewer would have sufficed, so quick was her apprehension.

"If it is a blank," she returned quickly, "then you know of nothing to stop us—no river we cannot swim, and no great mountains like those where Quito is."

"But I happen to know, Rima, for it has been related to me by old Indians, that of all places that is the most difficult of access. There is a river there, and although it is not on the map, it would prove more impassable to us than the mighty Orinoco and Amazon. It has vast malarious swamps on its borders, overgrown with dense forest, teeming with savage and venomous animals, so that even the Indians dare not venture near it. And

even before the river is reached there is a range of precipitous mountains called by the same name—just there where your pebble fell—the mountains of Riolama——"

Hardly had the name fallen from my lips before a change swift as lightning came over her countenance; all doubt, anxiety, petulance, hope, and despondence, and these in ever-varying degrees, chasing each other like shadows, had vanished, and she was instinct and burning with some new powerful emotion which had flashed into her soul.

"Riolama! Riolama!" she repeated so rapidly and in a tone so sharp that it tingled in the brain. "That is the place I am seeking! There was my mother found—there are her people and mine! Therefore was I called Riolama—that is my name!"

"Rima!" I returned, astonished at her words.

"No, no, no—Riolama. When I was a child, and the priest baptised me, he named me Riolama—the place where my mother was found. But it was long to say, and they called me Rima."

Suddenly she became still, and then cried in a ringing voice—

"And he knew it all along—that old man—he knew that Riolama was near—only there where the pebble fell—that we could go there!"

While speaking she turned towards her home, pointing with raised hand. Her whole appearance now reminded me of that first meeting with her when the serpent bit me; the soft red of her irides shone like fire, her delicate skin seemed to glow with an intense rose-colour. and her

frame trembled with her agitation, so that her loose cloud of hair was in motion as if blown through by the wind.

"Traitor! Traitor!" she cried, still looking homewards and using quick, passionate gestures. "It was all known to you, and you deceived me all these years; even to me, Rima, you lied with your lips! Oh, horrible! Was there ever such a scandal known in Guayana? Come, follow me, let us go at once to Riolama." And without so much as casting a glance behind to see whether I followed or no, she hurried away, and in a couple of minutes disappeared from sight over the edge of the flat summit.

"Rima! Rima! Come back and listen to me! Oh, you are mad! Come back! Come back!"

But she would not return or pause and listen; and looking after her I saw her bounding down the rocky slope like some wild, agile creature possessed of padded hoofs and an infallible instinct; and before many minutes she vanished from sight among crags and trees lower down.

"Nuflo, old man," said I, looking out towards his lodge, "are there no shooting pains in those old bones of yours to warn you in time of the tempest about to burst on your head?"

Then I sat down to think.

CHAPTER XII

TO follow impetuous, bird-like Rima in her descent of the hill would have been impossible, nor had I any desire to be a witness of old Nuflo's discomfiture at the finish. It was better to leave them to settle their quarrel themselves, while I occupied myself in turning over these fresh facts in my mind to find out how they fitted into the speculative structure I had been building during the last two or three weeks. But it soon struck me that it was getting late, that the sun would be gone in a couple of hours; and at once I began the descent. It was not accomplished without some bruises and a good many scratches. After a cold draught, obtained by putting my lips to a black rock from which the water was trickling, I set out on my walk home, keeping near the western border of the forest for fear of losing myself. I had covered about half the distance from the foot of the hill to Nuflo's lodge when the sun went down. Away on my left the evening uproar of the howling monkeys burst out, and after three or four minutes ceased; the after silence was pierced at intervals by screams of birds going to roost among the trees in the distance, and by many minor sounds close at hand, of small bird, frog, and insect. The western sky was now

like amber-coloured flame, and against that immeasurably distant luminous background the near branches and clustered foliage looked black; but on my left hand the vegetation still appeared of a uniform dusky green. In a little while night would drown all colour, and there would be no light but that of the wandering lantern-fly, always unwelcome to the belated walker in a lonely place, since, like the ignis fatuus, it is confusing to the sight and sense of direction.

With increasing anxiety I hastened on, when all at once a low growl issuing from the bushes some yards ahead of me brought me to a stop. In a moment the dogs, Susio and Goloso, rushed out from some hiding-place furiously barking; but they quickly recognised me and slunk back again. Relieved from fear, I walked on for a short distance; then it struck me that the old man must be about somewhere, as the dogs scarcely ever stirred from his side. Turning back I went to the spot where they had appeared to me; and there, after a while, I caught sight of a dim, yellow form, as one of the brutes rose up to look at me. He had been lying on the ground by the side of a wide-spreading bush, dead and dry, but overgrown by a creeping plant which had completely covered its broad, flat top like a piece of tapestry thrown over a table, its slender terminal stems and leaves hanging over the edge like a deep fringe. But the fringe did not reach to the ground, and under the bush, in its dark interior, I caught sight of the other dog; and after gazing in for some time I also discovered a black, recumbent form, which I took to be Nuflo.

"What are you doing there, old man?" I cried. "Where is Rima—have you not seen her? Come out."

Then he stirred himself, slowly creeping out on all fours; and, finally, getting free of the dead twigs and leaves, he stood up and faced me. He had a strange, wild look, his white beard all disordered, moss and dead leaves clinging to it, his eyes staring like an owl's, while his mouth opened and shut, the teeth striking together audibly, like an angry peccary's. After silently glaring at me in this mad way for some moments he burst out: "Cursed be the day when I first saw you, man of Caracas! Cursed be the serpent that bit you and had not sufficient power in its venom to kill! Ha! you come from Ytaioa, where you talked with Rima? And you have now returned to the tiger's den to mock that dangerous animal with the loss of its whelp. Fool, if you did not wish the dogs to feed on your flesh it would have been better if you had taken your evening walk in some other direction."

These raging words did not have the effect of alarming me in the least, nor even of astonishing me very much, albeit up till now the old man had always shown himself suave and respectful. His attack did not seem quite spontaneous. In spite of the wildness of his manner and the violence of his speech, he appeared to be acting a part which he had rehearsed beforehand. I was only angry, and stepping forward I dealt him a very sharp rap with my knuckles on his chest. "Moderate your language, old man," I said; "remember that you are addressing a superior."

"What do you say to me?" he screamed in a shrill,

broken voice, accompanying his words with emphatic gestures. "Do you think you are on the pavement of Caracas? Here are no police to protect you—here we are alone in the desert, where names and titles are nothing standing man to man."

"An old man to a young one," I returned. "And in virtue of my youth I am your superior. Do you wish me to take you by the throat and shake your insolence out of you?"

"What, do you threaten me with violence?" he exclaimed, throwing himself into a hostile attitude. "You, the man I saved, and sheltered, and fed, and treated like a son! Destroyer of my peace, have you not injured me enough? You have stolen my grandchild's heart from me; with a thousand inventions you have driven her mad! My child, my angel, Rima, my saviour! With your lying tongue you have changed her into a demon to persecute me! And you are not satisfied, but must finish your evil work by inflicting blows on my worn body! All, all is lost to me! Take my life if you wish it, for now it is worth nothing, and I desire not to keep it!" And here he threw himself on his knees, and tearing open his old, ragged mantle, presented his naked breast to me. "Shoot! Shoot!" he screeched. "And if you have no weapon take my knife and plunge it into this sad heart, and let me die!" And drawing his knife from its sheath, he flung it down at my feet.

All this performance only served to increase my anger and contempt; but before I could make any reply I caught sight of a shadowy object at some distance moving

towards us—something grey and formless, gliding swift and noiseless, like some great low-flying owl among the trees. It was Rima, and hardly had I seen her before she was with us, facing old Nuflo, her whole frame quivering with passion, her wide-open eyes appearing luminous in that dim light.

"You are here!" she cried in that quick, ringing tone that was almost painful to the sense. "You thought to escape me! To hide yourself from my eyes in the wood! Miserable! Do you not know that I have need of you—that I have not finished with you yet? Do you then wish to be scourged to Riolama with thorny twigs—to be dragged thither by the beard?"

He had been staring open-mouthed at her, still on his knees, and holding his mantle open with his skinny hands. "Rima! Rima! have mercy on me!" he cried out piteously. "Oh, my child, I cannot go to Riolama, it is so far—so far. And I am old and should meet my death. Oh, Rima, child of the woman I saved from death, have you no compassion? I shall die, I shall die!"

"Shall you die? Not until you have shown me the way to Riolama. And when I have seen Riolama with my eyes then you may die, and I shall be glad at your death; and the children and the grandchildren and cousins and friends of all the animals you have slain and fed on shall know that you are dead and be glad at your death. For you have deceived me with lies all these years—even me—and are not fit to live! Come now to Riolama; rise instantly, I command you!"

Instead of rising he suddenly put out his hand and

snatched up the knife from the ground. "Do you then wish me to die?" he cried. "Shall you be glad at my death? Behold, then I shall slay myself before your eyes. By my own hand, Rima, I am now about to perish, striking this knife into my heart!"

While speaking he waved the knife in a tragic manner over his head, but I made no movement; I was convinced that he had no intention of taking his own life—that he was still acting. Rima, incapable of understanding such a thing, took it differently.

"Oh, you are going to kill yourself!" she cried. "Oh, wicked man, wait until you know what will happen to you after death. All shall now be told to my mother. Hear my words, then kill yourself."

She also now dropped on to her knees, and lifting her clasped hands and fixing her resentful sparkling eyes on the dim blue patch of heaven visible beyond the tree-tops, began to speak rapidly in clear, vibrating tones. She was praying to her mother in heaven; and while Nuflo listened absorbed, his mouth open, his eyes fixed on her, the hand that clutched the knife dropped to his side. I also heard with the greatest wonder and admiration. For she had been shy and reticent with me, and now, as if oblivious of my presence, she was telling aloud the secrets of her inmost heart.

"O mother, mother, listen to me, to Rima, your beloved child!" she began. "All these years I have been wickedly deceived by grandfather—Nuflo—the old man that found you. Often have I spoken to him of Riolama, where you once were, and your people are, and he denied

all knowledge of such a place. Sometimes he said that it was at an immense distance, in a great wilderness full of serpents larger than the trunks of great trees, and of evil spirits and savage men, slayers of all strangers. At other times he affirmed that no such place existed; that it was a tale told by the Indians; such false things did he say to me — to Rima, your child. O mother, can you believe such wickedness?

"Then a stranger, a white man from Venezuela, came into our woods: this is the man that was bitten by a serpent, and his name is Abel: only I do not call him by that name, but by other names which I have told you. But perhaps you did not listen, or did not hear, for I spoke softly and not as now, on my knees, solemnly. For I must tell you, O mother, that after you died the priest at Voa told me repeatedly that when I prayed, whether to you or to any of the saints, or to the Mother of Heaven, I must speak as he had taught me, if I wished to be heard and understood. And that was most strange, since you had taught me differently; but you were living then, at Voa, and now that you are in Heaven perhaps you know better. Therefore listen to me now, O mother, and let nothing I say escape you.

"When this white man had been for some days with us a strange thing happened to me, which made me different, so that I was no longer Rima, although Rima still—so strange was this thing; and I often went to the pool to look at myself and see the change in me, but nothing different could I see. In the first place it came from his eyes passing into mine, and filling me just as the lightning

fills a cloud at sunset: afterwards it was no longer from his eyes only, but it came into me whenever I saw him, even at a distance, when I heard his voice, and most of all when he touched me with his hand. When he is out of my sight I cannot rest until I see him again; and when I see him then I am glad, yet in such fear and trouble that I hide myself from him. O mother, it could not be told; for once when he caught me in his arms and compelled me to speak of it he did not understand; yet there was need to tell it; then it came to me that only to our people could it be told, for they would understand, and reply to me, and tell me what to do in such a case.

"And now, O mother, this is what happened next. I went to grandfather and first begged and then commanded him to take me to Riolama; but he would not obey, nor give attention to what I said, but whenever I spoke to him of it he rose up and hurried from me; and when I followed he flung back a confused and angry reply, saying in the same breath that it was so long since he had been to Riolama that he had forgotten where it was, and that no such place existed. And which of his words were true and which false I knew not: so that it would have been better if he had returned no answer at all; and there was no help to be got from him. And having thus failed, and there being no other person to speak to except this stranger, I determined to go to him, and in his company seek through the whole world for my people. This will surprise you, O mother, because of that fear which came on me in his presence, causing me to hide from his sight; but my wish was so great that for a time it

overcame my fear; so that I went to him as he sat alone in the wood, sad because he could not see me, and spoke to him, and led him to the summit of Ytaioa to show me all the countries of the world from the summit. And you must also know that I tremble in his presence, not because I fear him as I fear Indians and cruel men; for he has no evil in him, and is beautiful to look at, and his words are gentle, and his desire is to be always with me, so that he differs from all other men I have seen, just as I differ from all women, except from you only, O sweet mother.

"On the mountain-top he marked out and named all the countries of the world, the great mountains, the rivers, the plains, the forests, the cities; and told me also of the peoples, whites and savages, but of our people nothing. And beyond where the world ends there is water, water, water. And when he spoke of that unknown part on the borders of Guayana, on the side of the Cordilleras, he named the mountains of Riolama, and in that way I first found out where my people are. I then left him on Ytaioa, he refusing to follow me, and ran to grandfather and taxed him with his falsehoods; and he, finding I knew all, escaped from me into the woods, where I have now found him once more, talking with the stranger. And now, O mother, seeing himself caught and unable to escape a second time, he has taken up a knife to kill himself, so as not to take me to Riolama; and he is only waiting until I finish speaking to you, for I wish him to know what will happen to him after death. Therefore, O mother, listen well and do what I tell you. When he has killed himself and has come into that place

where you are, see that he does not escape the punishment he merits. Watch well for his coming, for he is full of cunning and deceit, and will endeavour to hide himself from your eyes. When you have recognised him—an old man, brown as an Indian, with a white beard—point him out to the angels, and say, 'This is Nuflo, the bad man that lied to Rima.' Let them take him and singe his wings with fire, so that he may not escape by flying; and afterwards thrust him into some dark cavern under a mountain, and place a great stone that a hundred men could not remove over its mouth, and leave him there alone and in the dark for ever!"

Having ended, she rose quickly from her knees, and at the same moment Nuflo, dropping the knife, cast himself prostrate at her feet.

"Rima—my child, my child, not that!" he cried out in a voice that was broken with terror. He tried to take hold of her feet with his hands, but she shrank from him with aversion; still he kept on crawling after her like a disabled lizard, abjectly imploring her to forgive him, reminding her that he had saved from death the woman whose enmity had now been enlisted against him, and declaring that he would do anything she commanded him, and gladly perish in her service.

It was a pitiable sight, and moving quickly to her side I touched her on the shoulder and asked her to forgive him.

The response came quickly enough. Turning to him once more she said: "I forgive you, grandfather. And now get up and take me to Riolama."

He rose, but only to his knees. "But you have not told *her!*" he said, recovering his natural voice, although still anxious, and jerking a thumb over his shoulder. "Consider, my child, that I am old and shall doubtless perish on the way. What would become of my soul in such a case? For now you have told her everything, and it will not be forgotten."

She regarded him in silence for a few moments, then moving a little way apart, dropped on to her knees again, and with raised hands and eyes fixed on the blue space above, already sprinkled with stars, prayed again.

"O mother, listen to me, for I have something fresh to say to you. Grandfather has not killed himself, but has asked my forgiveness and has promised to obey me. O mother, I have forgiven him, and he will now take me to Riolama, to our people. Therefore, O mother, if he dies on the way to Riolama let nothing be done against him, but remember only that I forgave him at the last; and when he comes into that place where you are, let him be well received, for that is the wish of Rima, your child."

As soon as this second petition was ended she was up again and engaged in an animated discussion with him, urging him to take her without further delay to Riolama; while he, now recovered from his fear, urged that so important an undertaking required a great deal of thought and preparation; that the journey would occupy about twenty days, and unless he set out well provided with food he would starve before accomplishing half the distance; and his death would leave her worse off than before: he

concluded by affirming that he could not start in less time than seven or eight days.

For a while I listened with keen interest to this dispute, and at length interposed once more on the old man's side. The poor girl in her petition had unwittingly revealed to me the power I possessed, and it was a pleasing experience to exercise it. Touching her shoulder again, I assured her that seven or eight days was only a reasonable time in which to prepare for so long a journey: she instantly yielded, and after one glance at my face she moved swiftly away into the darker shadows, leaving me alone with the old man.

As we returned together through the now profoundly dark wood I explained to him how the subject of Riolama had first come up during my conversation with Rima, and he then apologised for the violent language he had used to me. This personal question disposed of, he spoke of the pilgrimage before him, and informed me in confidence that he intended preparing a quantity of smoke-dried meat and packing it in a bag, with a layer of cassava bread, dried pumpkin slips, and such innocent trifles to conceal it from Rima's keen sight and delicate nostrils. Finally, he made a long rambling statement, which, I vainly imagined, was intended to lead up to an account of Rima's origin, with something about her people at Riolama; but it led to nothing except an expression of opinion that the girl was afflicted with a maggot in the brain, but that as she had interest with the powers above, especially with her mother, who was now a very important person among the celestials, it was good policy to

submit to her wishes. Turning to me, doubtless to wink (only I missed the sign owing to the darkness), he added that it was a fine thing to have a friend at court. With a little gratulatory chuckle he went on to say that for others it was necessary to obey all the ordinances of the Church, to contribute to its support, hear mass, confess from time to time, and receive absolution: consequently those who went out into the wilderness, where there were no churches and no priests to absolve them, did so at the risk of losing their souls. But with him it was different: he expected in the end to escape the fires of purgatory, and go directly in all his uncleanness to heaven—a thing, he remarked, which happened to very few; and he, Nuflo, was no saint, and had first become a dweller in the desert, as a very young man, in order to escape the penalty of his misdeeds.

I could not resist the temptation of remarking here that to an unregenerate man the celestial country might turn out a somewhat uncongenial place for a residence. He replied airily that he had considered the point and had no fear about the future; that he was old, and from all he had observed of the methods of government followed by those who ruled over earthly affairs from the sky, he had formed a clear idea of that place, and believed that even among so many glorified beings he would be able to meet with those who would prove companionable enough, and would think no worse of him on account of his little blemishes.

How he had first got this idea into his brain about Rima's ability to make things smooth for him after death

I cannot say; probably it was the effect of the girl's powerful personality and vivid faith acting on an ignorant and extremely superstitious mind. While she was making that petition to her mother in heaven it did not seem in the least ridiculous to me: I had felt no inclination to smile, even when hearing all that about the old man's wings being singed to prevent his escape by flying. Her rapt look; the intense conviction that vibrated in her ringing, passionate tones; the brilliant scorn with which she, a hater of bloodshed, one so tender towards all living things, even the meanest, bade him kill himself, and only hear first how her vengeance would pursue his deceitful soul into other worlds; the clearness with which she had related the facts of the case, disclosing the inmost secrets of her heart—all this had had a strange, convincing effect on me. Listening to her I was no longer the enlightened, the creedless man. She herself was so near to the supernatural that it seemed brought near me; indefinable feelings, which had been latent in me, stirred into life, and following the direction of her divine, lustrous eyes, fixed on the blue sky above, I seemed to see there another being like herself, a Rima glorified, leaning her pale, spiritual face to catch the winged words uttered by her child on earth. And even now, while hearing the old man's talk, showing as it did a mind darkened with such gross delusions, I was not yet altogether free from the strange effect of that prayer. Doubtless it was a delusion; her mother was not really there above listening to the girl's voice. Still, in some mysterious way, Rima had become to me, even as to superstitious old Nuflo,

a being apart and sacred, and this feeling seemed to mix with my passion, to purify and exalt it and make it infinitely sweet and precious.

After we had been silent for some time I said, "Old man, the result of the grand discussion you have had with Rima is that you have agreed to take her to Riolama, but about my accompanying you not one word has been spoken by either of you."

He stopped short to stare at me, and although it was too dark to see his face, I felt his astonishment. "Señor!" he exclaimed, "we cannot go without you. Have you not heard my granddaughter's words—that it is only because of you that she is about to undertake this crazy journey? If you are not with us in this thing, then, señor, here we must remain. But what will Rima say to that?"

"Very well, I will go, but only on one condition."

"What is it?" he asked, with a sudden change of tone, which warned me that he was becoming cautious again.

"That you tell me the whole story of Rima's origin, and how you came to be now living with her in this solitary place, and who these people are she wishes to visit at Riolama."

"Ah, señor, it is a long story, and sad. But you shall hear it all. You must hear it, señor, since you are now one of us; and when I am no longer here to protect her then she will be yours. And although you will never be able to do more than old Nuflo for her, perhaps she will be better pleased; and you, señor, better able to exist innocently by her side, without eating flesh, since you will always have that rare flower to delight you.

But the story would take long to tell. You shall hear it all as we journey to Riolama. What else will there be to talk about when we are walking that long distance, and when we sit at night by the fire?"

"No, no, old man, I am not to be put off in that way. *I* must hear it before I start."

But he was determined to reserve the narrative until the journey, and after some further argument I yielded the point.

CHAPTER XIII

THAT evening by the fire old Nuflo, lately so miserable, now happy in his delusions, was more than usually gay and loquacious. He was like a child, who by timely submission has escaped a threatened severe punishment. But his lightness of heart was exceeded by mine; and, with the exception of one other yet to come, that evening now shines in memory as the happiest my life has known. For Rima's sweet secret was known to me; and her very ignorance of the meaning of the feeling she experienced, which caused her to fly from me as from an enemy, only served to make the thought of it more purely delightful.

On this occasion she did not steal away like a timid mouse to her own apartment, as her custom was, but remained to give that one evening a special grace, seated well away from the fire in that same shadowy corner where I had first seen her indoors, when I had marvelled at her altered appearance.

From that corner she could see my face, with the firelight full upon it, she herself in shadow, her eyes veiled by their drooping lashes. Sitting there the vivid consciousness of my happiness was like draughts of strong, delicious wine, and its effect was like wine, imparting

such freedom to fancy, such fluency, that again and again old Nuflo applauded, crying out that I was a poet, and begging me to put it all into rhyme. I could not do that to please him, never having acquired the art of improvisation—that idle trick of making words jingle which men of Nuflo's class in my country so greatly admire: yet it seemed to me on that evening that my feelings could be adequately expressed only in that sublimated language used by the finest minds in their inspired moments; and, accordingly, I fell to reciting. But not from any modern, nor from the poets of the last century, nor even from the greater seventeenth century. I kept to the more ancient romances and ballads, the sweet old verse that, whether glad or sorrowful, seems always natural and spontaneous as the song of a bird, and so simple that even a child can understand it.

It was late that night before all the romances I remembered or cared to recite were exhausted, and not until then did Rima come out of her shaded corner and steal silently away to her sleeping-place.

Although I had resolved to go with them, and had set Nuflo's mind at rest on the point, I was bent on getting the request from Rima's own lips; and the next morning the opportunity of seeing her alone presented itself, after old Nuflo had sneaked off with his dogs. From the moment of his departure I kept a close watch on the house, as one watches a bush in which a bird he wishes to see has concealed itself, and out of which it may dart at any moment and escape unseen.

At length she came forth, and seeing me in the way, would have slipped back into hiding; for, in spite of her boldness on the previous day, she now seemed shyer than ever when I spoke to her.

"Rima," I said, "do you remember where we first talked together under a tree one morning, when you spoke of your mother, telling me that she was dead?"

"Yes."

"I am going now to that spot to wait for you. I must speak to you again in that place about this journey to Riolama." As she kept silent, I added, "Will you promise to come to me there?"

She shook her head, turning half away.

"Have you forgotten our compact, Rima?"

"No," she returned; and then, suddenly coming near, spoke in a low tone, "I will go there to please you, and you must also do as I tell you."

"What do you wish, Rima?"

She came nearer still. "Listen! You must not look into my eyes, you must not touch me with your hands."

"Sweet Rima, I must hold your hand when I speak with you."

"No, no, no," she murmured, shrinking from me; and finding that it must be as she wished, I reluctantly agreed.

Before I had waited long she appeared at the trysting-place, and stood before me, as on a former occasion, on that same spot of clean yellow sand, clasping and unclasping her fingers, troubled in mind even then. Only now her trouble was different and greater, making her shyer and more reticent.

"Rima, your grandfather is going to take you to Riolama. Do you wish me to go with you?"

"Oh, do you not know that?" she returned, with a swift glance at my face.

"How should I know?"

Her eyes wandered away restlessly. "On Ytaioa you told me a hundred things which I did not know," she replied in a vague way, wishing, perhaps, to imply that with so great a knowledge of geography it was strange I did not know everything, even her most secret thoughts.

"Tell me, why must you go to Riolama?"

"You have heard. To speak to my people."

"What will you say to them? Tell me."

"What you do not understand. How tell you?"

"I understand you when you speak in Spanish."

"Oh, that is not speaking."

"Last night you spoke to your mother in Spanish. Did you not tell her everything?"

"Oh no—not then. When I tell her everything I speak in another way, in a low voice—not on my knees and praying. At night, and in the woods, and when I am alone I tell her. But perhaps she does not hear me; she is not here, but up there—so far! She never answers, but when I speak to my people they will answer me."

Then she turned away as if there was nothing more to be said.

"Is this all I am to hear from you, Rima—these few words?" I exclaimed. "So much did you say to your grandfather, so much to your dead mother, but to me you say so little!"

She turned again, and with eyes cast down replied—

"He deceived me—I had to tell him that, and then to pray to mother. But to you that do not understand, what can I say? Only that you are not like him and all those that I knew at Voa. It is so different—and the same. You are you, and I am I; why is it—do you know?"

"No; yes—I know, but cannot tell you. And if you find your people what will you do—leave me to go to them? Must I go all the way to Riolama only to lose you?"

"Where I am there you must be."

"Why?"

"Do I not see it there?" she returned, with a quick gesture to indicate that it appeared in my face.

"Your sight is keen, Rima—keen as a bird's. Mine is not so keen. Let me look once more into those beautiful wild eyes, then perhaps I shall see in them as much as you see in mine."

"Oh no, no, not that!" she murmured in distress, drawing away from me; then with a sudden flash of brilliant colour cried—

"Have you forgotten the compact—the promise you made me?"

Her words made me ashamed, and I could not reply. But the shame was as nothing in strength compared to the impulse I felt to clasp her beautiful body in my arms and cover her face with kisses. Sick with desire, I turned away, and sitting on a root of the tree, covered my face with my hands.

She came nearer: I could see her shadow through my fingers; then her face and wistful, compassionate eyes.

"Forgive me, dear Rima," I said, dropping my hands again. "I have tried so hard to please you in everything. Touch my face with your hand—only that, and I will go to Riolama with you, and obey you in all things."

For a while she hesitated, then stepped quickly aside so that I could not see her; but I knew that she had not left me, that she was standing just behind me. And after waiting a moment longer I felt her fingers touching my skin, softly, trembling over my cheek as if a soft-winged moth had fluttered against it; then the slight aerial touch was gone, and she, too, moth-like, had vanished from my side.

Left alone in the wood I was not happy. That fluttering, flattering touch of her finger-tips had been to me like spoken language, and more eloquent than language, yet the sweet assurance it conveyed had not given perfect satisfaction; and when I asked myself why the gladness of the previous evening had forsaken me—why I was infected with this new sadness when everything promised well for me, I found that it was because my passion had greatly increased during the last few hours; even during sleep it had been growing, and could no longer be fed by merely dwelling in thought on the charms, moral and physical, of its object, and by dreams of future fruition.

I concluded that it would be best for Rima's sake as well as my own to spend a few of the days, before setting out on our journey, with my Indian friends, who would

be troubled at my long absence; and, accordingly, next morning I bade good-bye to the old man, promising to return in three or four days, and then started without seeing Rima, who had quitted the house before her usual time. After getting free of the woods, on casting back my eyes I caught sight of the girl standing under an isolated tree watching me with that vague, misty, greenish appearance she so frequently had when seen in the light shade at a short distance.

"Rima!" I cried, hurrying back to speak to her, but when I reached the spot she had vanished; and after waiting some time, seeing and hearing nothing to indicate that she was near me, I resumed my walk, half thinking that my imagination had deceived me.

I found my Indian friends home again, and was not surprised to observe a distinct change in their manner towards me. I had expected as much; and considering that they must have known very well where and in whose company I had been spending my time, it was not strange. Coming across the savannah that morning I had first begun to think seriously of the risk I was running. But this thought only served to prepare me for a new condition of things; for now to go back and appear before Rima, and thus prove myself to be a person not only capable of forgetting a promise occasionally, but also of a weak, vacillating mind, was not to be thought of for a moment.

I was received—not welcomed—quietly enough: not a question, not a word, concerning my long absence fell from anyone; it was as if a stranger had appeared among

them, one about whom they knew nothing, and consequently regarded with suspicion, if not actual hostility. I affected not to notice the change, and dipped my hand uninvited in the pot to satisfy my hunger, and smoked and dozed away the sultry hours in my hammock. Then I got my guitar and spent the rest of the day over it, tuning it, touching the strings so softly with my finger-tips that to a person four yards off the sound must have seemed like the murmur or buzz of an insect's wings; and to this scarcely audible accompaniment I murmured in an equally low tone a new song.

In the evening, when all were gathered under the roof and I had eaten again, I took up the instrument once more, furtively watched by all those half-closed animal eyes, and swept the strings loudly, and sang aloud. I sang an old simple Spanish melody, to which I had put words in their own language—a language with no words not in everyday use, in which it is so difficult to express feelings out of and above the common. What I had been constructing and practising all the afternoon *sotto voce* was a kind of ballad, an extremely simple tale of a poor Indian living alone with his young family in a season of dearth: how day after day he ranged the voiceless woods to return each evening with nothing but a few withered sour berries in his hand, to find his lean, large-eyed wife still nursing the fire that cooked nothing, and his children crying for food, showing their bones more plainly through their skins every day; and how, without anything miraculous, anything wonderful, happening, that barrenness passed from earth, and the garden once more yielded

them pumpkin and maize and manioc, the wild fruits ripened, and the birds returned, filling the forest with their cries; and so their long hunger was satisfied, and the children grew sleek, and played and laughed in the sunshine; and the wife, no longer brooding over the empty pot, wove a hammock of silk grass, decorated with blue-and-scarlet feathers of the macaw; and in that new hammock the Indian rested long from his labours, smoking endless cigars.

When I at last concluded with a loud note of joy, a long, involuntary suspiration in the darkening room told me that I had been listened to with profound interest; and, although no word was spoken, though I was still a stranger and under a cloud, it was plain that the experiment had succeeded, and that for the present the danger was averted.

I went to my hammock and slept, but without undressing. Next morning I missed my revolver and found that the holster containing it had been detached from the belt. My knife had not been taken, possibly because it was under me in the hammock while I slept. In answer to my inquiries I was informed that Runi had *borrowed* my weapon to take it with him to the forest, where he had gone to hunt, and that he would return it to me in the evening. I affected to take it in good part, although feeling secretly ill at ease. Later in the day I came to the conclusion that Runi had had it in his mind to murder me, that I had softened him by singing that Indian story, and that by taking possession of the revolver he showed that he now only meant to keep me

a prisoner. Subsequent events confirmed me in this suspicion. On his return he explained that he had gone out to seek for game in the woods; and, going without a companion, he had taken my revolver to preserve him from dangers—meaning those of a supernatural kind; and that he had had the misfortune to drop it among the bushes while in pursuit of some animal. I answered hotly that he had not treated me like a friend; that if he had asked me for the weapon it would have been lent to him; that as he had taken it without permission he must pay me for it. After some pondering, he said that when he took it I was sleeping soundly; also, that it would not be lost; he would take me to the place where he had dropped it, when we could search together for it.

He was in appearance more friendly towards me now, even asking me to repeat my last evening's song, and so we had that performance all over again to everybody's satisfaction. But when morning came he was not inclined to go to the woods: there was food enough in the house, and the pistol would not be hurt by lying where it had fallen a day longer. Next day the same excuse; still I disguised my impatience and suspicion of him and waited, singing the ballad for the third time that evening. Then I was conducted to a wood about a league and half away, and we hunted for the lost pistol among the bushes, I with little hope of finding it, while he attended to the bird voices and frequently asked me to stand or lie still when a chance of something offered.

The result of that wasted day was a determination on my part to escape from Runi as soon as possible,

although at the risk of making a deadly enemy of him and of being compelled to go on that long journey to Riolama with no better weapon than a hunting-knife. I had noticed, while appearing not to do so, that outside of the house I was followed or watched by one or other of the Indians, so that great circumspection was needed. On the following day I attacked my host once more about the revolver, telling him with well-acted indignation that if not found it must be paid for. I went so far as to give a list of the articles I should require, including a bow and arrows, zabatana, two spears, and other things which I need not specify, to set me up for life as a wild man in the woods of Guayana. I was going to add a wife, but as I had already been offered one it did not appear to be necessary. He seemed a little taken aback at the value I set upon my weapon, and promised to go and look for it again. Then I begged that Kua-kó, in whose sharpness of sight I had great faith, might accompany us. He consented, and named the next day but one for the expedition. Very well, thought I, to-morrow their suspicion will be less, and my opportunity will come; then taking up my rude instrument, I gave them an old Spanish song—

Desde aquel doloroso momento:

but this kind of music had lost its charm for them, and I was asked to give them the ballad they understood so well, in which their interest seemed to increase with every repetition. In spite of anxiety it amused me to see old Cla-cla regarding me fixedly with owlish eyes

and lips moving. My tale had no wonderful things in it, like hers of the olden time, which she told only to send her hearers to sleep. Perhaps she had discovered by now that it was the strange honey of melody which made the coarse, common cassava-bread of everyday life in my story so pleasant to the palate. I was quite prepared to receive a proposal to give her music and singing lessons, and to bequeath a guitar to her in my last will and testament. For, in spite of her hoary hair and million wrinkles, she, more than any other savage I had met with, seemed to have taken a draught from Ponce de Leon's undiscovered fountain of eternal youth. Poor old witch!

The following day was the sixth of my absence from Rima, and one of intense anxiety to me, a feeling which I endeavoured to hide by playing with the children, fighting our old comic stick fights, and by strumming noisily on the guitar. In the afternoon, when it was hottest, and all the men who happened to be indoors were lying in their hammocks, I asked Kua-kó to go with me to the stream to bathe. He refused—I had counted on that—and earnestly advised me not to bathe in the pool I was accustomed to, as some little caribe fishes had made their appearance there and would be sure to attack me. I laughed at his idle tale, and taking up my cloak swung out of the door, whistling a lively air. He knew that I always threw my cloak over my head and shoulders as a protection from the sun and stinging flies when coming out of the water, and so his suspicion was not aroused, and I was not followed.

The pool was about ten minutes' walk from the house; I arrived at it with palpitating heart, and going round to its end, where the stream was shallow, sat down to rest for a few moments and take a few sips of cool water dipped up in my palm. Presently I rose, crossed the stream, and began running, keeping among the low trees near the bank until a dry gully, which extended for some distance across the savannah, was reached. By following its course the distance to be covered would be considerably increased, but the shorter way would have exposed me to sight and made it more dangerous. I had put forth too much speed at first, and in a short time my exertions, and the hot sun, together with my intense excitement, overcame me. I dared not hope that my flight had not been observed; I imagined that the Indians, unencumbered by any heavy weight, were already close behind me, and ready to launch their deadly spears at my back. With a sob of rage and despair I fell prostrate on my face in the dry bed of the stream, and for two or three minutes remained thus exhausted and unmanned, my heart throbbing so violently that my whole frame was shaken. If my enemies had come on me then disposed to kill me, I could not have lifted a hand in defence of my life. But minutes passed, and they came not. I rose and went on, at a fast walk now, and when the sheltering stream-bed ended, I stooped among the sere dwarfed shrubs scattered about here and there on its southern side; and now creeping and now running, with an occasional pause to rest and look back, I at last reached the dividing ridge at its southern

extremity. The rest of the way was over comparatively easy ground, inclining downwards; and with that glad green forest now full in sight, and hope growing stronger every minute in my breast, my knees ceased to tremble, and I ran on again, scarcely pausing until I had touched and lost myself in the welcome shadows.

CHAPTER XIV

AH that return to the forest where Rima dwelt, after so anxious a day, when the declining sun shone hotly still, and the green woodland shadows were so grateful! The coolness, the sense of security, allayed the fever and excitement I had suffered on the open savannah; I walked leisurely, pausing often to listen to some bird voice or to admire some rare insect or parasitic flower shining star-like in the shade. There was a strangely delightful sensation in me. I likened myself to a child that, startled at something it had seen while out playing in the sun, flies to its mother to feel her caressing hand on its cheek and forget its tremors. And describing what I felt in that way, I was a little ashamed and laughed at myself; nevertheless the feeling was very sweet. At that moment Mother and Nature seemed one and the same thing. As I kept to the more open part of the wood, on its southernmost border, the red flame of the sinking sun was seen at intervals through the deep humid green of the higher foliage. How every object it touched took from it a new wonderful glory! At one spot, high up where the foliage was scanty, and slender bush ropes and moss depended like broken cordage from a dead limb—just there, bathing itself in that glory-giving light, I noticed a fluttering bird,

and stood still to watch its antics. Now it would cling, head downwards, to the slender twigs, wings and tail open; then, righting itself, it would flit from waving line to line, dropping lower and lower; and anon soar upwards a distance of twenty feet and alight to recommence the flitting and swaying and dropping towards the earth. It was one of those birds that have a polished plumage, and as it moved this way and that, flirting its feathers, they caught the beams and shone at moments like glass or burnished metal. Suddenly another bird of the same kind dropped down to it as if from the sky, straight and swift as a falling stone; and the first bird sprang up to meet the comer, and after rapidly wheeling round each other for a moment they fled away in company, screaming shrilly through the wood, and were instantly lost to sight, while their jubilant cries came back fainter and fainter at each repetition.

I envied them not their wings: at that moment earth did not seem fixed and solid beneath me, nor I bound by gravity to it. The faint, floating clouds, the blue infinite heaven itself, seemed not more ethereal and free than I, or the ground I walked on. The low, stony hills on my right hand, of which I caught occasional glimpses through the trees, looking now blue and delicate in the level rays, were no more than the billowy projections on the moving cloud of earth: the trees of unnumbered kinds—great mora, cecropia, and greenheart, bush and fern and suspended lianas, and tall palms balancing their feathery foliage on slender stems—all was but a fantastic mist embroidery covering the surface of that floating cloud on which my feet were set, and which floated with me near the sun.

The red evening flame had vanished from the summits of the trees, the sun was setting, the woods in shadow, when I got to the end of my walk. I did not approach the house on the side of the door, yet by some means those within became aware of my presence, for out they came in a great hurry, Rima leading the way, Nuflo behind her, waving his arms and shouting. But as I drew near the girl dropped behind and stood motionless regarding me, her face pallid and showing strong excitement. I could scarcely remove my eyes from her eloquent countenance: I seemed to read in it relief and gladness mingled with surprise and something like vexation. She was piqued perhaps that I had taken her by surprise, that after much watching for me in the wood I had come through it undetected when she was indoors.

"Happy the eyes that see you!" shouted the old man, laughing boisterously.

"Happy are mine that look on Rima again," I answered. "I have been long absent."

"Long—you may say so," returned Nuflo. "We had given you up. We said that, alarmed at the thought of the journey to Riolama, you had abandoned us."

"*We* said!" exclaimed Rima, her pallid face suddenly flushing. "I spoke differently."

"Yes, I know—I know!" he said airily, waving his hand. "You said that he was in danger, that he was kept against his will from coming. He is present now—let him speak."

"She was right," I said. "Ah, Nuflo, old man, you have lived long, and got much experience, but not in-

sight—not that inner vision that sees further than the eyes."

"No, not that—I know what you mean," he answered. Then, tossing his hand towards the sky, he added, "The knowledge you speak of comes from there."

The girl had been listening with keen interest, glancing from one to the other. "What!" she spoke suddenly, as if unable to keep silence, "do you think, grandfather, that *she* tells me—when there is danger—when the rain will cease—when the wind will blow—everything? Do I not ask and listen, lying awake at night? She is always silent, like the stars."

Then, pointing to me with her finger, she finished—

"*He* knows so many things! Who tells them to *him*?"

"But distinguish, Rima. You do not distinguish the great from the little," he answered loftily. "*We* know a thousand things, but they are things that any man with a forehead can learn. The knowledge that comes from the blue is not like that—it is more important and miraculous. Is it not so, señor?" he ended, appealing to me.

"Is it, then, left for me to decide?" said I, addressing the girl.

But though her face was towards me she refused to meet my look and was silent. Silent, but not satisfied: she doubted still, and had perhaps caught something in my tone that strengthened her doubt.

Old Nuflo understood the expression. "Look at me,

Rima," he said, drawing himself up. "I am old, and he is young—do I not know best? I have spoken and have decided it."

Still that unconvinced expression, and the face turned expectant to me.

"Am I to decide?" I repeated.

"Who, then?" she said at last, her voice scarcely more than a murmur; yet there was reproach in the tone, as if she had made a long speech and I had tyrannously driven her to it.

"Thus, then, I decide," said I. "To each one of us, as to every kind of animal, even to small birds and insects, and to every kind of plant, there is given something peculiar—a fragrance, a melody, a special instinct, an art, a knowledge, which no other has. And to Rima has been given this quickness of mind and power to divine distant things; it is hers, just as swiftness and grace and changeful, brilliant colour are the humming-bird's; therefore she need not that anyone dwelling in the blue should instruct her."

The old man frowned and shook his head; while she, after one swift, shy glance at my face, and with something like a smile flitting over her delicate lips, turned and reentered the house.

I felt convinced from that parting look that she had understood me, that my words had in some sort given her relief; for, strong as was her faith in the supernatural, she appeared as ready to escape from it, when a way of escape offered, as from the limp cotton gown and constrained manner worn in the house. The religion and cotton dress

were evidently remains of her early training at the settlement of Voa.

Old Nuflo, strange to say, had proved better than his word. Instead of inventing new causes for delay, as I had imagined would be the case, he now informed me that his preparations for the journey were all but complete, that he had only waited for my return to set out.

Rima soon left us in her customary way, and then, talking by the fire, I gave an account of my detention by the Indians and of the loss of my revolver, which I thought very serious.

"You seem to think little of it," I said, observing that he took it very coolly. "Yet I know not how I shall defend myself in case of an attack."

"I have no fear of an attack," he answered. "It seems to me the same thing whether you have a revolver or many revolvers and carbines and swords, or no revolver—no weapon at all. And for a very simple reason. While Rima is with us, so long as we are on her business, we are protected from above. The angels, señor, will watch over us by day and night. What need of weapons, then, except to procure food?"

"Why should not the angels provide us with food also?" said I.

"No, no, that is a different thing," he returned. "That is a small and low thing, a necessity common to all creatures, which all know how to meet. You would not expect an angel to drive away a cloud of mosquitoes, or to remove a bush-tick from your person. No, sir, you may talk of natural gifts, and try to make Rima believe

that she is what she is, and knows what she knows, because, like a humming-bird or some plants with a peculiar fragrance, she has been made so. It is wrong, señor, and pardon me for saying it, it ill becomes you to put such fables into her head."

I answered, with a smile, "She herself seems to doubt what you believe."

"But, señor, what can you expect from an ignorant girl like Rima? She knows nothing, or very little, and will not listen to reason. If she would only remain quietly indoors, with her hair braided, and pray and read her Catechism, instead of running about after flowers and birds and butterflies and such unsubstantial things, it would be better for both of us."

"In what way, old man?"

"Why, it is plain that if she would cultivate the acquaintance of the people that surround her—I mean those that come to her from her sainted mother—and are ready to do her bidding in everything, she could make it more safe for us in this place. For example, there is Runi and his people, why should they remain living so near us as to be a constant danger when a pestilence of small-pox or some other fever might easily be sent to kill them off?"

"And have you ever suggested such a thing to your grandchild?"

He looked surprised and grieved at the question. "Yes, many times, señor," he said. "I should have been a poor Christian had I not mentioned it. But when I speak of it she gives me a look and is gone, and I see no

more of her all day, and when I see her she refuses even to answer me;—so perverse, so foolish is she in her ignorance; for, as you can see for yourself, she has no more sense or concern about what is most important than some little painted fly that flits about all day long without any object."

CHAPTER XV

THE next day we were early at work. Nuflo had already gathered, dried, and conveyed to a place of concealment the greater portion of his garden produce. He was determined to leave nothing to be taken by any wandering party of savages that might call at the house during our absence. He had no fear of a visit from his neighbours; they would not know, he said, that he and Rima were out of the wood. A few large earthen pots, filled with shelled maize, beans, and sun-dried strips of pumpkin, still remained to be disposed of. Taking up one of these vessels and asking me to follow with another, he started off through the wood. We went a distance of five or six hundred yards; then made our way down a very steep incline, close to the border of the forest on the western side; arrived at the bottom, we followed the bank a little further, and I then found myself once more at the foot of the precipice over which I had desperately thrown myself on the stormy evening after the snake had bitten me. Nuflo, stealing silently and softly before me through the bushes, had observed a caution and secrecy in approaching this spot resembling that of a wise old hen when she visits her hidden nest to lay an egg. And here was his nest, his most secret

treasure-house, which he had probably not revealed even to me without a sharp inward conflict, notwithstanding that our fates were now linked together. The lower portion of the bank was of rock; and in it, about ten or twelve feet above the ground, but easily reached from below, there was a natural cavity large enough to contain all his portable property. Here, besides the food-stuff, he had already stored a quantity of dried tobacco leaf, his rude weapons, cooking utensils, ropes, mats, and other objects. Two or three more journeys were made for the remaining pots, after which we adjusted a slab of sandstone to the opening, which was fortunately narrow, plastered up the crevices with clay, and covered them over with moss to hide all traces of our work.

Towards evening, after we had refreshed ourselves with a long siesta, Nuflo brought out from some other hiding-place two sacks; one weighing about twenty pounds and containing smoke-dried meat, also grease and gum for lighting purposes, and a few other small objects. This was his load; the other sack, which was smaller and contained parched corn and raw beans, was for me to carry.

The old man, cautious in all his movements, always acting as if surrounded by invisible spies, delayed setting out until an hour after dark. Then, skirting the forest on its west side, we left Ytaioa on our right hand, and after travelling over rough, difficult ground, with only the stars to light us, we saw the waning moon rise not long before dawn. Our course had been a north-easterly one at first; now it was due east, with broad, dry savannahs and

patches of open forest as far as we could see before us. It was weary walking on that first night, and weary waiting on the first day when we sat in the shade during the long, hot hours, persecuted by small stinging flies; but the days and nights that succeeded were far worse, when the weather became bad with intense heat and frequent heavy falls of rain. The one compensation I had looked for, which would have outweighed all the extreme discomforts we suffered, was denied me. Rima was no more to me or with me now than she had been during those wild days in her native woods, when every bush and bole and tangled creeper or fern-frond had joined in a conspiracy to keep her out of my sight. It is true that at intervals in the daytime she was visible, sometimes within speaking distance, so that I could address a few words to her, but there was no companionship, and we were fellow-travellers only like birds flying independently in the same direction, not so widely separated but that they can occasionally hear and see each other. The pilgrim in the desert is sometimes attended by a bird, and the bird, with its freer motions, will often leave him a league behind and seem lost to him, but only to return and show its form again; for it has never lost sight nor recollection of the traveller toiling slowly over the surface. Rima kept us company in some such wild erratic way as that. A word, a sign from Nuflo was enough for her to know the direction to take; the distant forest or still more distant mountain near which we should have to pass. She would hasten on and be lost to our sight, and when there was a forest in the way she would explore it, resting in the shade and

finding her own food; but invariably she was before us at each resting or camping place.

Indian villages were seen during the journey, but only to be avoided: and in like manner, if we caught sight of Indians travelling or camping at a distance, we would alter our course, or conceal ourselves to escape observation. Only on one occasion, two days after setting out, were we compelled to speak with strangers. We were going round a hill, and all at once came face to face with three persons travelling in an opposite direction—two men and a woman, and, by a strange fatality, Rima at that moment happened to be with us. We stood for some time talking to these people, who were evidently surprised at our appearance, and wished to learn who we were; but Nuflo, who spoke their language like one of themselves, was too cunning to give any true answer. They, on their side, told us that they had been to visit a relation at Chani, the name of a river three days ahead of us, and were now returning to their own village at Baila-baila, two days beyond Parahuari. After parting from them Nuflo was much troubled in his mind for the rest of that day. These people, he said, would probably rest at some Parahuari village, where they would be sure to give a description of us, and so it might eventually come to the knowledge of our unneighbourly neighbour Runi that we had left Ytaioa.

Other incidents of our long and wearisome journey need not be related. Sitting under some shady tree during the sultry hours, with Rima only too far out of earshot, or by the nightly fire, the old man told me

little by little and with much digression, chiefly on sacred subjects, the strange story of the girl's origin.

About seventeen years back—Nuflo had no sure method to compute time by—when he was already verging on old age, he was one of a company of nine men, living a kind of roving life in the very part of Guayana through which we were now travelling; the others, much younger than himself, were all equally offenders against the laws of Venezuela, and fugitives from justice. Nuflo was the leader of this gang, for it happened that he had passed a great portion of his life outside the pale of civilisation, and could talk the Indian languages, and knew this part of Guayana intimately. But according to his own account he was not in harmony with them. They were bold, desperate men, whose evil appetites had so far only been whetted by the crimes they had committed; while he, with passions worn out, recalling his many bad acts, and with a vivid conviction of the truth of all he had been taught in early life—for Nuflo was nothing if not religious—was now grown timid and desirous only of making his peace with Heaven. This difference of disposition made him morose and quarrelsome with his companions; and they would, he said, have murdered him without remorse if he had not been so useful to them. Their favourite plan was to hang about the neighbourhood of some small isolated settlement, keeping a watch on it, and, when most of the male inhabitants were absent, to swoop down on it and work their will. Now shortly after one of these raids it happened that a woman they had carried off, becoming a burden to them, was flung

into a river to the alligators; but when being dragged down to the waterside she cast up her eyes, and in a loud voice cried to God to execute vengeance on her murderers. Nuflo affirmed that he took no part in this black deed nevertheless, the woman's dying appeal to Heaven preyed on his mind; he feared that it might have won a hearing, and the "person" eventually commissioned to execute vengeance—after the usual delays, of course—might act on the principle of the old proverb—*Tell me whom you are with, and I will tell you what you are*—and punish the innocent (himself to wit) along with the guilty. But while thus anxious about his spiritual interests he was not yet prepared to break with his companions. He thought it best to temporise, and succeeded in persuading them that it would be unsafe to attack another Christian settlement for some time to come; that in the interval they might find some pleasure, if no great profit, by turning their attention to the Indians. The infidels, he said, were God's natural enemies and fair game to the Christian. To make a long story short, Nuflo's Christian band, after some successful adventures, met with a reverse which reduced their number from nine to five. Flying from their enemies they sought safety at Riolama, an uninhabited place, where they found it possible to exist for some weeks on game, which was abundant, and wild fruits.

One day at noon, while ascending a mountain at the southern extremity of the Riolama range, in order to get a view of the country beyond from the summit, Nuflo and his companions discovered a cave; and finding it dry,

without animal occupants, and with a level floor, they at once determined to make it their dwelling-place for a season. Wood for firing and water were to be had close by; they were also well provided with smoked flesh of a tapir they had slaughtered a day or two before, so that they could afford to rest for a time in so comfortable a shelter. At a short distance from the cave they made a fire on the rock to toast some slices of meat for their dinner; and while thus engaged all at once one of the men uttered a cry of astonishment, and casting up his eyes Nuflo beheld, standing near and regarding them with surprise and fear in her wide-open eyes, a woman of a most wonderful appearance. The one slight garment she had on was silky and white as the snow on the summit of some great mountain, but of the snow when the sinking sun touches and gives it some delicate changing colour which is like fire. Her dark hair was like a cloud from which her face looked out, and her head was surrounded by an aureole like that of a saint in a picture, only more beautiful. For, said Nuflo, a picture is a picture, and the other was a reality, which is finer. Seeing her he fell on his knees and crossed himself; and all the time her eyes, full of amazement and shining with such a strange splendour that he could not meet them, were fixed on him and not on the others; and he felt that she had come to save his soul, in danger of perdition owing to his companionship with men who were at war with God and wholly bad.

But at this moment his comrades, recovering from their astonishment, sprang to their feet, and the heavenly

woman vanished. Just behind where she had stood, and not twelve yards from them, there was a huge chasm in the mountain, its jagged precipitous sides clothed with thorny bushes; the men now cried out that she had made her escape that way, and down after her they rushed, pell-mell.

Nuflo cried out after them that they had seen a saint and that some horrible thing would befall them if they allowed any evil thought to enter their hearts; but they scoffed at his words, and were soon far down out of hearing, while he, trembling with fear, remained praying to the woman that had appeared to them, and had looked with such strange eyes at him, not to punish him for the sins of the others.

Before long the men returned, disappointed and sullen, for they had failed in their search for the woman; and perhaps Nuflo's warning words had made them give up the chase too soon. At all events, they seemed ill at ease, and made up their minds to abandon the cave: in a short time they left the place to camp that night at a considerable distance from the mountain. But they were not satisfied: they had now recovered from their fear, but not from the excitement of an evil passion; and finally, after comparing notes, they came to the conclusion that they had missed a great prize through Nuflo's cowardice; and when he reproved them they blasphemed all the saints in the calendar and even threatened him with violence. Fearing to remain longer in the company of such godless men, he only waited until they slept, then rose up cautiously, helped himself to most of the provisions, and made his

escape, devoutly hoping that after losing their guide they would all speedily perish.

Finding himself alone now and master of his own actions, Nuflo was in terrible distress, for while his heart was in the utmost fear, it yet urged him imperiously to go back to the mountain, to seek again for that sacred being who had appeared to him, and had been driven away by his brutal companions. If he obeyed that inner voice, he would be saved; if he resisted it then there would be no hope for him, and along with those who had cast the woman to the alligators he would be lost eternally. Finally, on the following day, he went back, although not without fear and trembling, and sat down on a stone just where he had sat toasting his tapir meat on the previous day. But he waited in vain, and at length that voice within him, which he had so far obeyed, began urging him to descend into the valley-like chasm down which the woman had escaped from his comrades, and to seek for her there. Accordingly he rose and began cautiously and slowly climbing down over the broken jagged rocks and through a dense mass of thorny bushes and creepers. At the bottom of the chasm a clear, swift stream of water rushed with foam and noise along its rocky bed; but before reaching it, and when it was still twenty yards lower down, he was startled by hearing a low moan among the bushes, and looking about for the cause, he found the wonderful woman—his saviour, as he expressed it. She was not now standing nor able to stand, but half reclining among the rough stones, one foot, which she had sprained in that headlong flight down the ragged slope, wedged

immovably between the rocks; and in this painful position she had remained a prisoner since noon on the previous day. She now gazed on her visitor in silent consternation; while he, casting himself prostrate on the ground, implored her forgiveness and begged to know her will. But she made no reply; and at length, finding that she was powerless to move, he concluded that, though a saint and one of the beings that men worship, she was also flesh and liable to accidents while sojourning on earth: and perhaps, he thought, that accident which had befallen her had been specially designed by the powers above to prove him. With great labour, and not without causing her much pain, he succeeded in extricating her from her position; and then finding that the injured foot was half crushed and blue and swollen, he took her up in his arms and carried her to the stream. There, making a cup of a broad green leaf, he offered her water, which she drank eagerly; and he also laved her injured foot in the cold stream and bandaged it with fresh aquatic leaves; finally he made her a soft bed of moss and dry grass and placed her on it. That night he spent keeping watch over her, at intervals applying fresh wet leaves to her foot as the old ones became dry and wilted from the heat of the inflammation.

The effect of all he did was that the terror with which she regarded him gradually wore off: and next day, when she seemed to be recovering her strength, he proposed by signs to remove her to the cave higher up, where she would be sheltered in case of rain. She appeared to understand him, and allowed herself to be taken up in his arms, and carried with much labour to the top of the

chasm. In the cave he made her a second couch, and tended her assiduously. He made a fire on the floor and kept it burning night and day, and supplied her with water to drink and fresh leaves for her foot. There was little more that he could do. From the choicest and fattest bits of toasted tapir flesh he offered her she turned away with disgust. A little cassava-bread soaked in water she would take, but seemed not to like it. After a time, fearing that she would starve, he took to hunting after wild fruits, edible bulbs and gums, and on these small things she subsisted during the whole time of their sojourn together in the desert.

The woman, although lamed for life, was now so far recovered as to be able to limp about without assistance, and she spent a portion of each day out among the rocks and trees on the mountains. Nuflo at first feared that she would now leave him, but before long he became convinced that she had no such intentions. And yet she was profoundly unhappy. He was accustomed to see her seated on a rock, as if brooding over some secret grief, her head bowed, and great tears falling from half-closed eyes.

From the first he had conceived the idea that she was in the way of becoming a mother at no distant date—an idea which seemed to accord badly with the suppositions as to the nature of this heavenly being he was privileged to minister to and so win salvation; but he was now convinced of its truth, and he imagined that in her condition he had discovered the cause of that sorrow and anxiety which preyed continually on her. By means

of that dumb language of signs which enabled them to converse together a little, he made it known to her that at a great distance from the mountains there existed a place where there were beings like herself, women, and mothers of children, who would comfort and tenderly care for her. When she had understood, she seemed pleased and willing to accompany him to that distant place; and so it came to pass that they left their rocky shelter and the mountains of Riolama far behind. But for several days, as they slowly journeyed over the plain, she would pause at intervals in her limping walk to gaze back on those blue summits, shedding abundant tears.

Fortunately the village of Voa, on the river of the same name, which was the nearest Christian settlement to Riolama, whither his course was directed, was well known to him; he had lived there in former years, and what was of great advantage, the inhabitants were ignorant of his worst crimes, or, to put it in his own subtle way, of the crimes committed by the men he had acted with. Great was the astonishment and curiosity of the people of Voa when, after many weeks' travelling, Nuflo arrived at last with his companion. But he was not going to tell the truth, nor even the least particle of the truth, to a gaping crowd of inferior persons. For these, ingenious lies: only to the priest he told the whole story, dwelling minutely on all he had done to rescue and protect her; all of which was approved by the holy man, whose first act was to baptise the woman for fear that she was not a Christian. Let it be said to Nuflo's credit that he objected to this ceremony, arguing that she could not

be a saint, with an aureole in token of her sainthood, yet stand in need of being baptised by a priest. A priest—he added, with a little chuckle of malicious pleasure—who was often seen drunk, who cheated at cards, and was sometimes suspected of putting poison on his fighting-cock's spur to make sure of the victory! Doubtless the priest had his faults; but he was not without humanity, and for the whole seven years of that unhappy stranger's sojourn at Voa he did everything in his power to make her existence tolerable. Some weeks after arriving she gave birth to a female child, and then the priest insisted on naming it Riolama, in order, he said, to keep in remembrance the strange story of the mother's discovery at that place.

Rima's mother could not be taught to speak either Spanish or Indian; and when she found that the mysterious and melodious sounds that fell from her own lips were understood by none she ceased to utter them, and thereafter preserved an unbroken silence among the people she lived with. But from the presence of others she shrank, as if in disgust or fear, excepting only Nuflo and the priest, whose kindly intentions she appeared to understand and appreciate. So far her life in the village was silent and sorrowful. With her child it was different; and every day that was not wet, taking the little thing by the hand, she would limp painfully out into the forest, and there, sitting on the ground, the two would commune with each other by the hour in their wonderful language.

At length she began to grow perceptibly paler and feebler week by week, day by day, until she could no

longer go out into the wood, but sat or reclined, panting for breath in the dull hot room, waiting for death to release her. At the same time little Rima, who had always appeared frail, as if from sympathy now began to fade and look more shadowy, so that it was expected she would not long survive her parent. To the mother death came slowly, but at last it seemed so near that Nuflo and the priest were together at her side waiting to see the end. It was then that little Rima, who had learnt from infancy to speak in Spanish, rose from the couch where her mother had been whispering to her, and began with some difficulty to express what was in the dying woman's mind. Her child, she had said, could not continue alive in that hot wet place, but if taken away to a distance where there were mountains and a cooler air she would revive and grow strong again.

Hearing this, old Nuflo declared that the child should not perish; that he himself would take her away to Parahuari, a distant place where there were mountains and dry plains and open woods; that he would watch over her and care for her there as he had cared for her mother at Riolama.

When the substance of this speech had been made known by Rima to the dying woman, she suddenly rose up from the couch, which she had not risen from for many days, and stood erect on the floor, her wasted face shining with joy. Then Nuflo knew that God's angels had come for her, and put out his arms to save her from falling; and even while he held her that sudden glory went out from her face, now of a dead white like burnt-out ashes;

and murmuring something soft and melodious, her spirit passed away.

Once more Nuflo became a wanderer, now with the fragile-looking little Rima for companion, the sacred child who had inherited the position of his intercessor from a sacred mother. The priest, who had probably become infected with Nuflo's superstitions, did not allow them to leave Voa empty-handed, but gave the old man as much calico as would serve to buy hospitality and whatsoever he might require from the Indians for many a day to come.

At Parahuari, where they arrived safely at last, they lived for some little time at one of the villages. But the child had an instinctive aversion to all savages, or possibly the feeling was derived from her mother, for it had shown itself early at Voa, where she had refused to learn their language; and this eventually led Nuflo to go away and live apart from them, in the forest by Ytaioa, where he made himself a house and garden. The Indians, however, continued friendly with him and visited him with frequency. But when Rima grew up, developing into that mysterious woodland girl I found her, they became suspicious, and in the end regarded her with dangerously hostile feeling. She, poor child, detested them because they were incessantly at war with the wild animals she loved, her companions; and having no fear of them, for she did not know that they had it in their minds to turn their little poisonous arrows against herself, she was constantly in the woods frustrating them; and the animals, in league with her, seemed to understand her note of warning and hid themselves or took to flight at the approach of danger. At

length their hatred and fear grew to such a degree that they determined to make away with her, and one day, having matured a plan, they went to the wood and spread themselves two and two about it. The couples did not keep together, but moved about or remained concealed at a distance of forty or fifty yards apart, lest she should be missed. Two of the savages, armed with blow-pipes, were near the border of the forest on the side nearest to the village, and one of them, observing a motion in the foliage of a tree, ran swiftly and cautiously towards it to try and catch a glimpse of the enemy. And he did see her no doubt, as she was there watching both him and his companions, and blew an arrow at her, but even while in the act of blowing it he was himself struck by a dart that buried itself deep in his flesh just over the heart. He ran some distance with the fatal barbed point in his flesh and met his comrade, who had mistaken him for the girl and shot him. The wounded man threw himself down to die, and dying related that he had fired at the girl sitting up in a tree and that she had caught the arrow in her hand only to hurl it instantly back with such force and precision that it pierced his flesh just over the heart. He had seen it all with his own eyes, and his friend who had accidentally slain him believed his story and repeated it to the others. Rima had seen one Indian shoot the other, and when she told her grandfather he explained to her that it was an accident, but he guessed why the arrow had been fired.

From that day the Indians hunted no more in the wood; and at length one day Nuflo, meeting an Indian

who did not know him and with whom he had some talk, heard the strange story of the arrow, and that the mysterious girl who could not be shot was the offspring of an old man and a Didi who had become enamoured of him; that, growing tired of her consort, the Didi had returned to her river, leaving her half-human child to play her malicious pranks in the wood.

This, then, was Nuflo's story, told not in Nuflo's manner, which was infinitely prolix; and think not that it failed to move me—that I failed to bless him for what he had done, in spite of his selfish motives.

CHAPTER XVI

WE were eighteen days travelling to Riolama, on the last two making little progress, on account of continuous rain, which made us miserable beyond description. Fortunately the dogs had found, and Nuflo had succeeded in killing, a great ant-eater, so that we were well supplied with excellent, strength-giving flesh. We were among the Riolama mountains at last, and Rima kept with us, apparently expecting great things. I expected nothing, for reasons to be stated by-and-by. My belief was that the only important thing that could happen to us would be starvation.

The afternoon of the last day was spent in skirting the foot of a very long mountain, crowned at its southern extremity with a huge, rocky mass resembling the head of a stone sphinx above its long, couchant body, and at its highest part about a thousand feet above the surrounding level. It was late in the day, raining fast again, yet the old man still toiled on, contrary to his usual practice, which was to spend the last daylight hours in gathering firewood and in constructing a shelter. At length, when we were nearly under the peak, he began to ascend. The rise in this place was gentle, and the vegetation, chiefly composed of dwarf thorn trees rooted

in the clefts of the rock, scarcely impeded our progress; yet Nuflo moved obliquely, as if he found the ascent difficult, pausing frequently to take breath and look round him. Then we came to a deep, ravine-like cleft in the side of the mountain, which became deeper and narrower above us, but below it broadened out to a valley; its steep sides as we looked down were clothed with dense, thorny vegetation, and from the bottom rose to our ears the dull sound of a hidden torrent. Along the border of this ravine Nuflo began toiling upwards, and finally brought us out upon a stony plateau on the mountain-side. Here he paused, and turning and regarding us with a look as of satisfied malice in his eyes, remarked that we were at our journey's end, and he trusted the sight of that barren mountainside would compensate us for all the discomforts we had suffered during the last eighteen days.

I heard him with indifference. I had already recognised the place from his own exact description of it, and I now saw all that I had looked to see—a big, barren hill. But Rima, what had she expected that her face wore that blank look of surprise and pain? "Is this the place where mother appeared to you?" she suddenly cried. "The very place—this! this!" Then she added, "The cave where you tended her—where is it?"

"Over there," he said, pointing across the plateau, which was partially overgrown with dwarf trees and bushes, and ended at a wall of rock, almost vertical and about forty feet high.

Going to this precipice, we saw no cave until Nuflo

had cut away two or three tangled bushes, revealing an opening behind, about half as high and twice as wide as the door of an ordinary dwelling-house.

The next thing was to make a torch, and aided by its light we groped our way in and explored the interior. The cave, we found, was about fifty feet long, narrowing to a mere hole at the extremity; but the anterior portion formed an oblong chamber, very lofty, with a dry floor. Leaving our torch burning, we set to work cutting bushes to supply ourselves with wood enough to last us all night. Nuflo, poor old man, loved a big fire dearly; a big fire and fat meat to eat (the ranker its flavour the better he liked it) were to him the greatest blessings that man could wish for: in me also the prospect of a cheerful blaze put a new heart, and I worked with a will in the rain, which increased in the end to a blinding downpour. By the time I dragged my last load in, Nuflo had got his fire well alight, and was heaping on wood in a most lavish way. "No fear of burning our house down to-night," he remarked, with a chuckle—the first sound of that description he had emitted for a long time.

After we had satisfied our hunger, and had smoked one or two cigarettes, the unaccustomed warmth, and dryness, and the firelight affected us with drowsiness, and I had probably been nodding for some time; but starting at last and opening my eyes, I missed Rima. The old man appeared to be asleep, although still in a sitting posture close to the fire. I rose and hurried out, drawing my cloak close around me to protect me from the rain; but what was my surprise on emerging from the cave to feel a dry,

bracing wind in my face and to see the desert spread out for leagues before me in the brilliant white light of a full moon! The rain had apparently long ceased, and only a few thin white clouds appeared moving swiftly over the wide blue expanse of heaven. It was a welcome change, but the shock of surprise and pleasure was instantly succeeded by the maddening fear that Rima was lost to me. She was nowhere in sight beneath, and running to the end of the little plateau to get free of the thorn trees, I turned my eyes towards the summit, and there, at some distance above me, caught sight of her standing motionless and gazing upwards. I quickly made my way to her side, calling to her as I approached; but she only half turned to cast a look at me and did not reply.

"Rima," I said, "why have you come here? Are you actually thinking of climbing the mountain at this hour of the night?"

"Yes—why not?" she returned, moving one or two steps from me.

"Rima—sweet Rima, will you listen to me?"

"Now? Oh, no—why do you ask that? Did I not listen to you in the wood before we started, and you also promised to do what I wished? See, the rain is over and the moon shines brightly. Why should I wait? Perhaps from the summit I shall see my people's country. Are we not near it now?"

"Oh, Rima, what do you expect to see? Listen—you must listen, for I know best. From that summit you would see nothing but a vast dim desert, mountain and

forest, mountain and forest, where you might wander for years, or until you perished of hunger, or fever, or were slain by some beast of prey or by savage men; but oh, Rima, never, never, never would you find your people, for they exist not. You have seen the false water of the mirage on the savannah, when the sun shines bright and hot; and if one were to follow it he would at last fall down and perish, with never a cool drop to moisten his parched lips. And your hope, Rima—this hope to find your people which has brought you all the way to Riolama—is a mirage, a delusion, which will lead to destruction if you will not abandon it."

She turned to face me with flashing eyes. "You know best!" she exclaimed. "You know best, and tell me that! Never until this moment have you spoken falsely. Oh, why have you said such things to me—named after this place, Riolama? Am I also like that false water you speak of—no divine Rima, no sweet Rima? My mother, had she no mother, no mother's mother? I remember her, at Voa, before she died, and this hand seems real—like yours; you have asked to hold it. But it is not he that speaks to me—not one that showed me the whole world on Ytaioa. Ah, you have wrapped yourself in a stolen cloak, only you have left your old grey beard behind! Go back to the cave and look for it, and leave me to seek my people alone!"

Once more, as on that day in the forest when she prevented me from killing the serpent, and as on the occasion of her meeting with Nuflo after we had been together on Ytaioa, she appeared transformed and instinct

with intense resentment—a beautiful human wasp, and every word a sting.

"Rima," I cried, "you are cruelly unjust to say such words to me. If you know that I have never deceived you before, give me a little credit now. You are no delusion—no mirage, but Rima, like no other being on earth. So perfectly truthful and pure I cannot be, but rather than mislead you with falsehoods I would drop down and die on this rock, and lose you and the sweet light that shines on us for ever."

As she listened to my words, spoken with passion, she grew pale and clasped her hands: "What have I said? What have I said?" She spoke in a low voice charged with pain, and all at once she came nearer, and with a low, sobbing cry sank down at my feet, uttering, as on the occasion of finding me lost at night in the forest near her home, tender, sorrowful expressions in her own mysterious language. But before I could take her in my arms she rose again quickly to her feet and moved away a little space from me.

"Oh no, no, it cannot be that you know best!" she began again. "But I know that you have never sought to deceive me. And now, because I falsely accused you, I cannot go there without you"—pointing to the summit—"but must stand still and listen to all you have to say."

"You know, Rima, that your grandfather has now told me your history—how he found your mother at this place, and took her to Voa, where you were born; but of your mother's people he knows nothing, and therefore he can now take you no further."

"Ah, you think that! He says that now; but he deceived me all these years, and if he lied to me in the past, can he not still lie, affirming that he knows nothing of my people, even as he affirmed that he knew not Riolama?"

"He tells lies and he tells truth, Rima, and one can be distinguished from the other. He spoke truthfully at last, and brought us to this place, beyond which he cannot lead you."

"You are right; I must go alone."

"Not so, Rima, for where you go there we must go; only you will lead and we follow, believing only that our quest will end in disappointment, if not in death."

"Believe that and yet follow! Oh no! Why did he consent to lead me so far for nothing?"

"Do you forget that you compelled him? You know what he believes; and he is old and looks with fear at death, remembering his evil deeds, and is convinced that only through your intercession and your mother's he can escape from perdition. Consider, Rima, he could not refuse, to make you more angry and so deprive himself of his only hope."

My words seemed to trouble her, but very soon she spoke again with renewed animation. "If my people exist, why must it be disappointment and perhaps death? He does not know; but she came to him here—did she not? The others are not here, but perhaps not far off. Come, let us go to the summit together to see from it the desert beneath us—mountain and forest, mountain and forest. Somewhere there! You said that

I had knowledge of distant things. And shall I not know which mountain—which forest?"

"Alas! no, Rima; there is a limit to your far-seeing; and even if that faculty were as great as you imagine it would avail you nothing, for there is no mountain, no forest, in whose shadow your people dwell."

For a while she was silent, but her eyes and clasping fingers were restless and showed her agitation. She seemed to be searching in the depths of her mind for some argument to oppose to my assertions. Then in a low, almost despondent voice, with something of reproach in it, she said, "Have we come so far to go back again? You were not Nuflo to need my intercession, yet you came too."

"Where you are there I must be—you have said it yourself. Besides, when we started I had some hope of finding your people. Now I know better, having heard Nuflo's story. Now I know that your hope is a vain one."

"Why? Why? Was she not found here—mother? Where, then, are the others?"

"Yes, she was found here, alone. You must remember all the things she spoke to you before she died. Did she ever speak to you of her people—speak of them as if they existed, and would be glad to receive you among them some day?"

"No. Why did she not speak of that? Do you know—can you tell me?"

"I can guess the reason, Rima. It is very sad—so sad that it is hard to tell it. When Nuflo tended her in the

cave and was ready to worship her and do everything she wished, and conversed with her by signs, she showed no wish to return to her people. And when he offered her, in a way she understood, to take her to a distant place, where she would be among strange beings, among others like Nuflo, she readily consented, and painfully performed that long journey to Voa. Would you, Rima, have acted thus—would you have gone so far away from your beloved people, never to return, never to hear of them or speak to them again? Oh no, you could not; nor would she, if her people had been in existence. But she knew that she had survived them, that some great calamity had fallen upon and destroyed them. They were few in number, perhaps, and surrounded on every side by hostile tribes, and had no weapons, and made no war. They had been preserved because they inhabited a place apart, some deep valley perhaps, guarded on all sides by lofty mountains and impenetrable forests and marshes; but at last the cruel savages broke into this retreat and hunted them down, destroying all except a few fugitives, who escaped singly like your mother, and fled away to hide in some distant solitude."

The anxious expression on her face deepened as she listened to one of anguish and despair; and then, almost before I concluded, she suddenly lifted her hands to her head, uttering a low, sobbing cry, and would have fallen on the rock had I not caught her quickly in my arms. Once more in my arms—against my breast, her proper place! But now all that bright life seemed gone out of her; her head fell on my shoulder, and there was no

motion in her except at intervals a slight shudder in her frame accompanied by a low, gasping sob. In a little while the sobs ceased, the eyes were closed, the face still and deathly white, and with a terrible anxiety in my heart I carried her down to the cave.

CHAPTER XVII

AS I re-entered the cave with my burden Nuflo sat up and stared at me with a frightened look in his eyes. Throwing my cloak down I placed the girl on it and briefly related what had happened.

He drew near to examine her; then placed his hand on her heart. "Dead!—she is dead!" he exclaimed.

My own anxiety changed to an irrational anger at his words. "Old fool! She has only fainted," I returned. "Get me some water, quick!"

But the water failed to restore her, and my anxiety deepened as I gazed on that white, still face. Oh, why had I told her that sad tragedy I had imagined with so little preparation? Alas! I had succeeded too well in my purpose, killing her vain hope and her at the same moment.

The old man, still bending over her, spoke again. "No, I will not believe that she is dead yet; but, sir, if not dead, then she is dying."

I could have struck him down for his words. "She will die in my arms, then," I exclaimed, thrusting him roughly aside, and lifting her up with the cloak beneath her.

And while I held her thus, her head resting on my

arm, and gazed with unutterable anguish into her strangely white face, insanely praying to Heaven to restore her to me, Nuflo fell on his knees before her, and with bowed head, and hands clasped in supplication, began to speak.

"Rima! Grandchild!" he prayed, his quivering voice betraying his agitation. "Do not die just yet: you must not die—not wholly die—until you have heard what I have to say to you. I do not ask you to answer in words—you are past that, and I am not unreasonable. Only, when I finish, make some sign—a sigh, a movement of the eyelid, a twitch of the lips, even in the small corners of the mouth; nothing more than that, just to show that you have heard, and I shall be satisfied. Remember all the years that I have been your protector, and this long journey that I have taken on your account; also all that I did for your sainted mother before she died at Voa, to become one of the most important of those who surround the Queen of Heaven, and who, when they wish for any favour, have only to say half a word to get it. And do not cast in oblivion that at the last I obeyed your wish and brought you safely to Riolama. It is true that in some small things I deceived you; but that must not weigh with you, because it is a small matter and not worthy of mention when you consider the claims I have on you. In your hands, Rima, I leave everything, relying on the promise you made me, and on my services. Only one word of caution remains to be added. Do not let the magnificence of the place you are now about to enter, the new sights and colours, and the noise of shouting, and

musical instruments and blowing of trumpets, put these things out of your head. Nor must you begin to think meanly of yourself and be abashed when you find yourself surrounded by saints and angels; for you are not less than they, although it may not seem so at first when you see them in their bright clothes, which, they say, shine like the sun. I cannot ask you to tie a string round your finger: I can only trust to your memory, which was always good, even about the smallest things; and when you are asked, as no doubt you will be, to express a wish, remember before everything to speak of your grandfather, and his claims on you, also on your angelic mother, to whom you will present my humble remembrances."

During this petition, which in other circumstances would have moved me to laughter but now only irritated me, a subtle change seemed to come to the apparently lifeless girl to make me hope. The small hand in mine felt not so icy cold, and though no faintest colour had come to the face, its pallor had lost something of its deathly waxen appearance; and now the compressed lips had relaxed a little and seemed ready to part. I laid my finger-tips on her heart and felt, or imagined that I felt, a faint fluttering; and at last I became convinced that her heart was really beating.

I turned my eyes on the old man, still bending forward, intently watching for the sign he had asked her to make. My anger and disgust at his gross, earthy egoism had vanished. "Let us thank God, old man," I said, the tears of joy half choking my utterance. "She lives—she is recovering from her fit."

He drew back, and on his knees, with bowed head, murmured a prayer of thanks to Heaven.

Together we continued watching her face for half an hour longer, I still holding her in my arms, which could never grow weary of that sweet burden, waiting for other, surer signs of returning life; and she seemed now like one that had fallen into a profound, deathlike sleep which must end in death. Yet when I remembered her face as it had looked an hour ago, I was confirmed in the belief that the progress to recovery, so strangely slow, was yet sure. So slow, so gradual was this passing from death to life that we had hardly ceased to fear when we noticed that the lips were parted, or almost parted, that they were no longer white, and that under her pale, transparent skin a faint, bluish-rosy colour was now visible. And at length, seeing that all danger was past and recovery so slow, old Nuflo withdrew once more to the fireside, and stretching himself out on the sandy floor, soon fell into a deep sleep.

If he had not been lying there before me in the strong light of the glowing embers and dancing flames, I could not have felt more alone with Rima—alone amid those remote mountains, in that secret cavern, with lights and shadows dancing on its grey vault. In that profound silence and solitude the mysterious loveliness of the still face I continued to gaze on, its appearance of life without consciousness, produced a strange feeling in me, hard, perhaps impossible, to describe.

Once, when clambering among the rough rocks, overgrown with forest, among the Queneveta mountains,

I came on a single white flower which was new to me, which I have never seen since. After I had looked long at it, and passed on, the image of that perfect flower remained so persistently in my mind that on the following day I went again, in the hope of seeing it still untouched by decay. There was no change; and on this occasion I spent a much longer time looking at it, admiring the marvellous beauty of its form, which seemed so greatly to exceed that of all other flowers. It had thick petals, and at first gave me the idea of an artificial flower, cut by a divinely inspired artist from some unknown precious stone, of the size of a large orange and whiter than milk, and yet, in spite of its opacity, with a crystalline lustre on the surface. Next day I went again, scarcely hoping to find it still unwithered; it was fresh as if only just opened; and after that I went often, sometimes at intervals of several days, and still no faintest sign of any change, the clear, exquisite lines still undimmed, the purity and lustre as I had first seen it. Why, I often asked, does not this mystic forest flower fade and perish like others? That first impression of its artificial appearance had soon left me; it was, indeed, a flower, and, like other flowers, had life and growth, only with that transcendent beauty it had a different kind of life. Unconscious, but higher; perhaps immortal. Thus it would continue to bloom when I had looked my last on it; wind and rain and sunlight would never stain, never tinge, its sacred purity; the savage Indian, though he sees little to admire in a flower, yet seeing this one would veil his face and turn back; even the browsing

beast crashing his way through the forest, struck with its strange glory, would swerve aside and pass on without harming it. Afterwards I heard from some Indians, to whom I described it, that the flower I had discovered was called Hata; also that they had a superstition concerning it—a strange belief. They said that only one Hata flower existed in the world; that it bloomed in one spot for the space of a moon; that on the disappearance of the moon in the sky the Hata disappeared from its place, only to reappear blooming in some other spot, sometimes in some distant forest. And they also said that whosoever discovered the Hata flower in the forest would overcome all his enemies and obtain all his desires, and finally outlive other men by many years. But, as I have said, all this I heard afterwards, and my half-superstitious feeling for the flower had grown up independently in my own mind. A feeling like that was in me while I gazed on the face that had no motion, no consciousness in it, and yet had life, a life of so high a kind as to match with its pure, surpassing loveliness. I could almost believe that, like the forest flower, in this state and aspect it would endure for ever; endure and perhaps give of its own immortality to everything around it—to me, holding her in my arms and gazing fixedly on the pale face framed in its cloud of dark, silken hair; to the leaping flames that threw changing lights on the dim stony wall of rock; to old Nuflo and his two yellow dogs stretched out on the floor in eternal, unawakening sleep.

This feeling took such firm possession of my mind that

it kept me for a time as motionless as the form I held in my arms. I was only released from its power by noting still further changes in the face I watched, a more distinct advance towards conscious life. The faint colour, which had scarcely been more than a suspicion of colour, had deepened perceptibly; the lids were lifted so as to show a gleam of the crystal orbs beneath; the lips, too, were slightly parted.

And, at last, bending lower down to feel her breath, the beauty and sweetness of those lips could no longer be resisted, and I touched them with mine. Having once tasted their sweetness and fragrance, it was impossible to keep from touching them again and again. She was not conscious—how could she be and not shrink from my caress? Yet there was a suspicion in my mind, and drawing back I gazed into her face once more. A strange new radiance had overspread it. Or was this only an illusive colour thrown on her skin by the red firelight? I shaded her face with my open hand, and saw that her pallor had really gone, that the rosy flame on her cheeks was part of her life. Her lustrous eyes, half open, were gazing into mine. Oh, surely consciousness had returned to her! Had she been sensible of those stolen kisses? Would she now shrink from another caress? Trembling I bent down and touched her lips again, lightly, but lingeringly, and then again, and when I drew back and looked at her face the rosy flame was brighter, and the eyes, more open still, were looking into mine. And gazing with those open, conscious eyes, it seemed to me that at last, at last, the shadow that had rested between us had

vanished, that we were united in perfect love and confidence, and that speech was superfluous. And when I spoke it was not without doubt and hesitation: our bliss in those silent moments had been so complete, what could speaking do but make it less!

"My love, my life, my sweet Rima, I know that you will understand me now as you did not before, on that dark night—do you remember it, Rima?—when I held you clasped to my breast in the wood. How it pierced my heart with pain to speak plainly to you as I did on the mountain to-night—to kill the hope that had sustained and brought you so far from home! But now that anguish is over; the shadow has gone out of those beautiful eyes that are looking at me. Is it because loving me, knowing now what love is, knowing, too, how much I love you, that you no longer need to speak to any other living being of such things? To tell it, to show it, to me is now enough—is it not so, Rima? How strange it seemed, at first, when you shrank in fear from me! But, afterwards, when you prayed aloud to your mother, opening all the secrets of your heart, I understood it. In that lonely, isolated life in the wood you had heard nothing of love, of its power over the heart, its infinite sweetness; when it came to you at last it was a new, inexplicable thing, and filled you with misgivings and tumultuous thoughts, so that you feared it and hid yourself from its cause. Such tremors would be felt if it had always been night, with no light except that of the stars and the pale moon, as we saw it a little while ago on the mountain; and, at last, day dawned, and a strange, un-

heard-of rose and purple flame kindled in the eastern sky, foretelling the coming sun. It would seem beautiful beyond anything that night had shown to you, yet you would tremble, and your heart beat fast at that strange sight; you would wish to fly to those who might be able to tell you its meaning, and whether the sweet things it prophesied would ever really come. That is why you wished to find your people, and came to Riolama to seek them: and when you knew—when I cruelly told you—that they would never be found, then you imagined that that strange feeling in your heart must remain a secret for ever, and you could not endure the thought of your loneliness. If you had not fainted so quickly, then I should have told you what I must tell you now. They are lost, Rima—your people—but I am with you, and know what you feel, even if you have no words to tell it. But what need of words? It shines in your eyes, it burns like a flame in your face; I can feel it in your hands. Do you not also see it in my face—all that I feel for you, the love that makes me happy? For this is love, Rima, the flower and the melody of life, the sweetest thing, the sweet miracle that makes our two souls one."

Still resting in my arms, as if glad to rest there, still gazing into my face, it was clear to me that she understood my every word. And then, with no trace of doubt or fear left, I stooped again, until my lips were on hers; and when I drew back once more, hardly knowing which bliss was greatest—kissing her delicate mouth or gazing into her face—she all at once put her arms about my neck and drew herself up until she sat on my knee.

"Abel—shall I call you Abel now—and always?" she spoke, still with her arms round my neck. "Ah, why did you let me come to Riolama? I would come! I made him come—old grandfather, sleeping there: he does not count, but you—you! After you had heard my story, and knew that it was all for nothing! And all I wished to know was there—in you. Oh, how sweet it is! But a little while ago, what pain! When I stood on the mountain when you talked to me, and I knew that you knew best, and tried and tried not to know. At last I could try no more; they were all dead like mother; I had chased the false water on the savannah. 'Oh, let me die too,' I said, for I could not bear the pain. And afterwards, here in the cave, I was like one asleep, and when I woke I did not really wake. It was like morning with the light teasing me to open my eyes and look at it. Not yet, dear light; a little while longer, it is so sweet to lie still. But it would not leave me, and stayed teasing me still, like a small shining green fly; until, because it teased me so, I opened my lids just a little. It was not morning, but the firelight, and I was in your arms, not in my little bed. Your eyes looking, looking into mine. But I could see yours better. I remembered everything then, how you once asked me to look into your eyes. I remembered so many things—oh, so many!"

"How many things did you remember, Rima?"

"Listen, Abel, do you ever lie on the dry moss and look straight up into a tree and count a thousand leaves?"

"No, sweetest, that could not be done, it is so many to count. Do you know how many a thousand are?"

"Oh, do I not! When a humming-bird flies close to my face and stops still in the air, humming like a bee, and then is gone, in that short time I can count a hundred small round bright feathers on its throat. That is only a hundred; a thousand are more, ten times. Looking up I count a thousand leaves; then stop counting, because there are thousands more behind the first, and thousands more, crowded together so that I cannot count them. Lying in your arms, looking up into your face, it was like that: I could not count the things I remembered. In the wood, when you were there, and before; and long, long ago at Voa, when I was a child with mother."

"Tell me some of the things you remembered, Rima."

"Yes, one—only one now. When I was a child at Voa mother was very lame—you know that. Whenever we went out, away from the houses, into the forest, walking slowly, slowly, she would sit under a tree while I ran about playing. And every time I came back to her I would find her so pale, so sad, crying—crying. That was when I would hide and come softly back so that she would not hear me coming. 'Oh, mother, why are you crying? Does your lame foot hurt you?' And one day she took me in her arms and told me truly why she cried."

She ceased speaking, but looked at me with a strange new light coming into her eyes.

"Why did she cry, my love?"

"Oh, Abel, can you understand—now—at last!" And putting her lips close to my ear, she began to murmur soft, melodious sounds that told me nothing. Then drawing back her head, she looked again at me, her eyes glistening with tears, her lips half parted with a smile, tender and wistful.

Ah, poor child! in spite of all that had been said, all that had happened, she had returned to the old delusion that I must understand her speech. I could only return her look, sorrowfully and in silence.

Her face became clouded with disappointment, then she spoke again with something of pleading in her tone. "Look, we are not now apart, I hiding in the wood, you seeking, but together, saying the same things. In your language—yours and now mine. But before you came I knew nothing, nothing, for there was only grandfather to talk to. A few words each day, the same words. If yours is mine, mine must be yours. Oh, do you not know that mine is better?"

"Yes, better; but alas! Rima, I can never hope to understand your sweet speech, much less to speak it. The bird that only chirps and twitters can never sing like the organ-bird."

Crying, she hid her face against my neck, murmuring sadly between her sobs, "Never—never!"

How strange it seemed, in that moment of joy, such a passion of tears, such despondent words!

For some minutes I preserved a sorrowful silence, realising for the first time, so far as it was possible to realise such a thing, what my inability to understand her

secret language meant to her—that finer language in which alone her swift thoughts and vivid emotions could be expressed. Easily and well as she seemed able to declare herself in my tongue, I could well imagine that to her it would seem like the merest stammering. As she had said to me once when I asked her to speak in Spanish, "That is not speaking." And so long as she could not commune with me in that better language, which reflected her mind, there would not be that perfect union of soul she so passionately desired.

By-and-by, as she grew calmer, I sought to say something that would be consoling to both of us. "Sweetest Rima," I spoke, "it is so sad that I can never hope to talk with you in your way; but a greater love than this that is ours we could never feel, and love will make us happy, unutterably happy, in spite of that one sadness. And perhaps, after a while, you will be able to say all you wish in my language, which is also yours, as you said some time ago. When we are back again in the beloved wood, and talk once more under that tree where we first talked, and under the old mora, where you hid yourself and threw down leaves on me, and where you caught the little spider to show me how you made yourself a dress, you shall speak to me in your own sweet tongue, and then try to say the same things in mine. . . . And in the end, perhaps, you will find that it is not so impossible as you think."

She looked at me, smiling again through her tears, and shook her head a little.

"Remember what I have heard, that before your mother

died you were able to tell Nuflo and the priest what her wish was. Can you not, in the same way, tell me why she cried?"

"I can tell you, but it will not be telling you."

"I understand. You can tell the bare facts. I can imagine something more, and the rest I must lose. Tell me, Rima."

Her face became troubled; she glanced away and let her eyes wander round the dim, firelit cavern; then they returned to mine once more.

"Look," she said, "grandfather lying asleep by the fire. So far away from us—oh, so far! But if we were to go out from the cave, and on and on to the great mountains where the city of the sun is, and stood there at last in the midst of great crowds of people, all looking at us, talking to us, it would be just the same. They would be like the trees and rocks and animals—so far! Not with us nor we with them. But we are everywhere alone together, apart—we two. It is love; I know it now, but I did not know it before because I had forgotten what she told me. Do you think I can tell you what she said when I asked her why she cried? Oh no! Only this, she and another were like one, always, apart from the others. Then something came —something came! O Abel, was that the something you told me about on the mountain? And the other was lost for ever, and she was alone in the forests and mountains of the world. Oh, why do we cry for what is lost? Why do we not quickly forget it and feel glad again? Now only do I know what you felt, O sweet mother, when you sat still and cried. while I ran about and played and laughed! O

poor mother! Oh, what pain!" And hiding her face against my neck, she sobbed once more.

To my eyes also love and sympathy brought the tears; but in a little while the fond, comforting words I spoke and my caresses recalled her from that sad past to the present: then, lying back as at first, her head resting on my folded cloak, her body partly supported by my encircling arm and partly by the rock we were leaning against, her half-closed eyes turned to mine expressed a tender assured happiness —the chastened gladness of sunshine after rain; a soft delicious languor that was partly passionate with the passion etherealised.

"Tell me, Rima," I said, bending down to her, "in all those troubled days with me in the woods had you no happy moments? Did not something in your heart tell you that it was sweet to love, even before you knew what love meant?"

"Yes; and once—O Abel, do you remember that night, after returning from Ytaioa, when you sat so late talking by the fire—I in the shadow, never stirring, listening, listening; you by the fire with the light on your face, saying so many strange things? I was happy then—oh, how happy! It was black night and raining, and I a plant growing in the dark, feeling the sweet rain-drops falling, falling on my leaves. Oh, it will be morning by-and-by and the sun will shine on my wet leaves; and that made me glad till I trembled with happiness. Then suddenly the lightning would come, so bright, and I would tremble with fear, and wish that it would be dark again. That was when you looked at me sitting in the shadow, and I

could not take my eyes away quickly and could not meet yours, so that I trembled with fear."

"And now there is no fear—no shadow; now you are perfectly happy?"

"Oh, so happy! If the way back to the wood was longer, ten times, and if the great mountains, white with snow on their tops, were between, and the great dark forest, and rivers wider than Orinoco, still I would go alone without fear, because you would come after me, to join me in the wood, to be with me at last and always."

"But I should not let you go alone, Rima—your lonely days are over now."

She opened her eyes wider, and looked earnestly into my face. "I must go back alone, Abel," she said. "Before day comes I must leave you. Rest here, with grandfather, for a few days and nights, then follow me."

I heard her with astonishment. "It must not be, Rima," I cried. "What, let you leave me—now you are mine—to go all that distance, through all that wild country where you might lose yourself and perish alone? Oh, do not think of it!"

She listened, regarding me with some slight trouble in her eyes, but smiling a little at the same time. Her small hand moved up my arm and caressed my cheek; then she drew my face down to hers until our lips met. But when I looked at her eyes again I saw that she had not consented to my wish. "Do I not know all the way now," she spoke, "all the mountains, rivers, forests—how should I lose myself? And I must return quickly, not step by step, walking—resting, resting—walking, stopping to cook and

eat, stopping to gather firewood, to make a shelter—so many things! Oh, I shall be back in half the time; and I have so much to do."

"What can you have to do, love?—everything can be done when we are in the wood together."

A bright smile with a touch of mockery in it flitted over her face as she replied, "Oh, must I tell you that there are things you cannot do? Look, Abel," and she touched the slight garment she wore, thinner now than at first, and dulled by long exposure to sun and wind and rain.

I could not command her, and seemed powerless to persuade her; but I had not done yet, and proceeded to use every argument I could find to bring her round to my view; and when I finished she put her arms round my neck and drew herself up once more. "O Abel, how happy I shall be!" she said, taking no notice of all I had said. "Think of me alone, days and days, in the wood, waiting for you, working all the time; saying, 'Come quickly, Abel; come slow, Abel. O Abel, how long you are! Oh, do not come until my work is finished!' And when it is finished and you arrive you shall find me, but not at once. First you will seek for me in the house, then in the wood, calling, 'Rima! Rima!' And she will be there, listening, hid in the trees, wishing to be in your arms, wishing for your lips—oh, so glad, yet fearing to show herself. Do you know why? He told you—did he not?—that when he first saw her she was standing before him, all in white—a dress that was like snow on the mountain-tops, when the sun is setting and gives it rose and purple colour. I shall be like that, hidden among the trees, saying, 'Am I different—not

like Rima? Will he know me—will he love me just the same?' Oh, do I not know that you will be glad, and love me, and call me beautiful? Listen! Listen!" she suddenly exclaimed, lifting her face.

Among the bushes not far from the cave's mouth a small bird had broken out in song, a clear, tender melody soon taken up by other birds further away.

"It will soon be morning," she said, and then clasped her arms about me once more and held me in a long, passionate embrace; then slipping away from my arms and with one swift glance at the sleeping old man, passed out of the cave.

For a few moments I remained sitting, not yet realising that she had left me, so suddenly and swiftly had she passed from my arms and my sight; then, recovering my faculties, I started up and rushed out in hopes of overtaking her.

It was not yet dawn, but there was still some light from the full moon, now somewhere behind the mountains. Running to the verge of the bush-grown plateau, I explored the rocky slope beneath without seeing her form, and then called, "Rima! Rima!"

A soft, warbling sound, uttered by no bird, came up from the shadowy bushes far below; and in that direction I ran on; then pausing called again. The sweet sound was repeated once more, but much lower down now, and so faintly that I scarcely heard it. And when I went on further, and called again and again, there was no reply, and I knew that she had indeed gone on that long journey alone.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Nuflo at length opened his eyes he found me sitting alone and despondent by the fire, just returned from my vain chase. I had been caught in a heavy mist on the mountain-side, and was wet through as well as weighed down by fatigue and drowsiness, consequent upon the previous day's laborious march and my night-long vigil; yet I dared not think of rest. *She* had gone from me, and I could not have prevented it; yet the thought that I had allowed her to slip out of my arms, to go away alone on that long, perilous journey, was as intolerable as if I had consented to it.

Nuflo was at first startled to hear of her sudden departure; but he laughed at my fears, affirming that after having once been over the ground she could not lose herself; that she would be in no danger from the Indians, as she would invariably see them at a distance and avoid them, and that wild beasts, serpents, and other evil creatures would do her no harm. The small amount of food she required to sustain life could be found anywhere; furthermore, her journey would not be interrupted by bad weather, since rain and heat had no effect on her. In the end he seemed pleased that she had left us, saying that with Rima in the wood the house and cultivated

patch and hidden provisions and implements would be safe, for no Indian would venture to come where she was. His confidence reassured me, and casting myself down on the sandy floor of the cave, I fell into a deep slumber, which lasted until evening; then I only woke to share a meal with the old man, and sleep again until the following day.

Nuflo was not ready to start yet; he was enamoured of the unaccustomed comforts of a dry sleeping-place and a fire blown about by no wind and into which fell no hissing rain-drops. Not for two days more would he consent to set out on the return journey, and if he could have persuaded me our stay at Riolama would have lasted a week.

We had fine weather at starting; but before long it clouded, and then for upwards of a fortnight we had it wet and stormy, which so hindered us that it took us twenty-three days to accomplish the return journey, whereas the journey out had only taken eighteen. The adventures we met with and the pains we suffered during this long march need not be related. The rain made us miserable, but we suffered more from hunger than from any other cause, and on more than one occasion were reduced to the verge of starvation. Twice we were driven to beg for food at Indian villages, and as we had nothing to give in exchange for it, we got very little. It is possible to buy hospitality from the savage without fish-hooks, nails, and calico; but on this occasion I found myself without that impalpable medium of exchange, which had been so great a help to me on my first journey to

Parahuari. Now I was weak and miserable and without cunning. It is true that we could have exchanged the two dogs for cassava-bread and corn, but we should then have been worse off than ever. And in the end the dogs saved us by an occasional capture—an armadillo surprised in the open and seized before it could bury itself in the soil, or an iguana, opossum, or labba, traced by means of their keen sense of smell to its hiding-place. Then Nuflo would rejoice and feast, rewarding them with the skin, bones, and entrails. But at length one of the dogs fell lame, and Nuflo, who was very hungry, made its lameness an excuse for despatching it, which he did apparently without compunction, notwithstanding that the poor brute had served him well in its way. He cut up and smoke-dried the flesh, and the intolerable pangs of hunger compelled me to share the loathsome food with him. We were not only indecent, it seemed to me, but cannibals to feed on the faithful servant that had been our butcher. "But what does it matter?" I argued with myself. "All flesh, clean and unclean, should be, and is, equally abhorrent to me, and killing animals a kind of murder. But now I find myself constrained to do this evil thing that good may come. Only to live I take it now—this hateful strength-giver that will enable me to reach Rima, and the purer, better life that is to be."

During all that time, when we toiled onwards league after league in silence, or sat silent by the nightly fire, I thought of many things; but the past, with which I had definitely broken, was little in my mind. Rima was still the source and centre of all my thoughts; from her

they rose, and to her returned. Thinking, hoping, dreaming, sustained me in those dark days and nights of pain and privation. Imagination was the bread that gave me strength, the wine that exhilarated. What sustained old Nuflo's mind I know not. Probably it was like a chrysalis, dormant, independent of sustenance; the bright-winged image to be called at some future time to life by a great shouting of angelic hosts and noises of musical instruments slept secure, coffined in that dull, gross nature.

The old beloved wood once more! Never did his native village in some mountain valley seem more beautiful to the Switzer, returning, war-worn, from long voluntary exile, than did that blue cloud on the horizon —the forest where Rima dwelt, my bride, my beautiful— and towering over it the dark cone of Ytaioa, now seem to my hungry eyes! How near at last—how near! And yet the two or three intervening leagues to be traversed so slowly, step by step—how vast the distance seemed! Even at far Riolama, when I set out on my return, I scarcely seemed so far from my love. This maddening impatience told on my strength, which was small, and hindered me. I could not run nor even walk fast; old Nuflo, slow, and sober, with no flame consuming his heart, was more than my equal in the end, and to keep up with him was all I could do.

At the finish he became silent and cautious, first entering the belt of trees leading away through the low range of hills at the southern extremity of the wood. For a

mile or upwards we trudged on in the shade; then I began to recognise familiar ground, the old trees under which I had walked or sat, and knew that a hundred yards further on there would be a first glimpse of the palm-leaf thatch. Then all weakness forsook me; with a low cry of passionate longing and joy I rushed on ahead; but I strained my eyes in vain for a sight of that sweet shelter: no patch of pale yellow colour appeared amidst the universal verdure of bushes, creepers, and trees—trees beyond trees, trees towering above trees.

For some moments I could not realise it. No, I had surely made a mistake, the house had not stood on that spot; it would appear in sight a little further on. I took a few uncertain steps onwards, and then again stood still, my brain reeling, my heart swelling nigh to bursting with anguish. I was still standing motionless, with hand pressed to my breast, when Nuflo overtook me. "Where is it—the house?" I stammered, pointing with my hand. All his stolidity seemed gone now; he was trembling too, his lips silently moving. At length he spoke: "They have come—the children of hell have been here, and have destroyed everything!"

"Rima! What has become of Rima?" I cried; but without replying he walked on, and I followed.

The house, we soon found, had been burnt down. Not a stick remained. Where it had stood a heap of black ashes covered the ground—nothing more. But on looking round we could discover no sign of human beings having recently visited the spot. A rank growth of grass and herbage now covered the once clear space surrounding

the site of the dwelling, and the ash heap looked as if it had been lying there for a month at least. As to what had become of Rima the old man could say no word. He sat down on the ground overwhelmed at the calamity: Runi's people had been there, he could not doubt it, and they would come again, and he could only look for death at their hands. The thought that Rima had perished, that she was lost, was unendurable. It could not be! No doubt the Indians had come and destroyed the house during our absence; but she had returned, and they had gone away again to come no more. She would be somewhere in the forest, perhaps not far off, impatiently waiting our return. The old man stared at me while I spoke; he appeared to be in a kind of stupor, and made no reply: and at last, leaving him still sitting on the ground, I went into the wood to look for Rima.

As I walked there, occasionally stopping to peer into some shadowy glade or opening, and to listen, I was tempted again and again to call the name of her I sought aloud; and still the fear that by so doing I might bring some hidden danger on myself, perhaps on her, made me silent. A strange melancholy rested on the forest, a quietude seldom broken by a distant bird's cry. How, I asked myself, should I ever find her in that wide forest while I moved about in that silent, cautious way? My only hope was that she would find me. It occurred to me that the most likely place to seek her would be some of the old haunts known to us both, where we had talked together. I thought first of the mora tree, where she had hidden herself from me, and thither I directed my steps.

About this tree, and within its shade, I lingered for upwards of an hour; and, finally, casting my eyes up into the great dim cloud of green and purple leaves, I softly called, "Rima, Rima, if you have seen me, and have concealed yourself from me in your hiding-place, in mercy answer me—in mercy come down to me now!" But Rima answered not, nor threw down any red glowing leaves to mock me: only the wind, high up, whispered something low and sorrowful in the foliage; and turning I wandered away at random into the deeper shadows.

By-and-by I was startled by the long, piercing cry of a wild fowl, sounding strangely loud in the silence; and no sooner was the air still again than it struck me that no bird had uttered that cry. The Indian is a good mimic of animal voices, but practice had made me able to distinguish the true from the false bird note. For a minute or so I stood still, at a loss what to do, then moved on again with greater caution, scarcely breathing, straining my sight to pierce the shadowy depths. All at once I gave a great start, for directly before me, on the projecting root in the deeper shade of a tree, sat a dark, motionless human form. I stood still, watching it for some time, not yet knowing that it had seen me, when all doubts were put to flight by the form rising and deliberately advancing—a naked Indian with a zabatana in his hand. As he came up out of the deeper shade I recognised Piaké, the surly elder brother of my friend Kua-kó.

It was a great shock to meet him in the wood, but I had no time to reflect just then. I only remembered that

I had deeply offended him and his people, that they probably looked on me as an enemy, and would think little of taking my life. It was too late to attempt to escape by flight; I was spent with my long journey and the many privations I had suffered, while he stood there in his full strength with a deadly weapon in his hand.

Nothing was left but to put a bold face on, greet him in a friendly way, and invent some plausible story to account for my action in secretly leaving the village.

He was now standing still, silently regarding me, and glancing round I saw that he was not alone: at a distance of about forty yards on my right hand two other dusky forms appeared watching me from the deep shade.

"Piaké!" I cried, advancing three or four steps.

"You have returned," he answered, but without moving. "Where from?"

"Riolama."

He shook his head, then asked where it was.

"Twenty days towards the setting sun," I said. As he remained silent I added, "I heard that I could find gold in the mountains there. An old man told me, and we went to look for gold."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing."

"Ah!"

And so our conversation appeared to be at an end. But after a few moments my intense desire to discover whether the savages knew aught of Rima or not made me hazard a question.

"Do you live here in the forest now?" I asked.

He shook his head, and after a while said, "We come to kill animals."

"You are like me now," I returned quickly; "you fear nothing."

He looked distrustfully at me, then came a little nearer and said—

"You are very brave. I should not have gone twenty days' journey with no weapons and only an old man for companion. What weapons did you have?"

I saw that he feared me, and wished to make sure that I had it not in my power to do him some injury. "No weapon except my knife," I replied, with assumed carelessness. With that I raised my cloak so as to let him see for himself, turning my body round before him. "Have you found my pistol?" I added.

He shook his head; but he appeared less suspicious now and came close up to me. "How do you get food? Where are you going?" he asked.

I answered boldly, "Food! I am nearly starving. I am going to the village to see if the women have got any meat in the pot, and to tell Runi all I have done since I left him."

He looked at me keenly, a little surprised at my confidence perhaps, then said that he was also going back and would accompany me. One of the other men now advanced, blow-pipe in hand, to join us, and, leaving the wood, we started to walk across the savannah.

It was hateful to have to recross that savannah again, to leave the woodland shadows where I had hoped to find Rima; but I was powerless: I was a prisoner once more,

the lost captive recovered and not yet pardoned, probably never to be pardoned. Only by means of my own cunning could I be saved, and Nuflo, poor old man, must take his chance.

Again and again as we tramped over the barren ground, and when we climbed the ridge, I was compelled to stand still to recover breath, explaining to Piaké that I had been travelling day and night, with no meat during the last three days, so that I was exhausted. This was an exaggeration, but it was necessary to account in some way for the faintness I experienced during our walk, caused less by fatigue and want of food than by anguish of mind.

At intervals I talked to him, asking after all the other members of the community by name. At last, thinking only of Rima, I asked him if any other person or persons besides his people came to the wood now or lived there.

He said no.

"Once," I said, "there was a daughter of the Didi, a girl you all feared: is she there now?"

He looked at me with suspicion and then shook his head. I dared not press him with more questions; but after an interval he said plainly, "She is not there now."

And I was forced to believe him; for had Rima been in the wood *they* would not have been there. She was not there, this much I had discovered. Had she, then, lost her way, or perished on that long journey from Riolama? Or had she returned only to fall into the hands of her cruel enemies? My heart was heavy in me; but if these devils in human shape knew more than they had

told me, I must, I said, hide my anxiety and wait patiently to find it out, should they spare my life. And if they spared me and had not spared that other sacred life interwoven with mine, the time would come when they would find, too late, that they had taken to their bosom a worse devil than themselves.

CHAPTER XIX

MY arrival at the village created some excitement; but I was plainly no longer regarded as a friend or one of the family. Runi was absent, and I looked forward to his return with no little apprehension; he would doubtless decide my fate. Kua-kó was also away. The others sat or stood about the great room, staring at me in silence. I took no notice, but merely asked for food, then for my hammock, which I hung up in the old place, and lying down I fell into a doze. Runi made his appearance at dusk. I rose and greeted him, but he spoke no word, and, until he went to his hammock, sat in sullen silence, ignoring my presence.

On the following day the crisis came. We were once more gathered in the room—all but Kua-kó and another of the men, who had not yet returned from some expedition—and for the space of half an hour not a word was spoken by anyone. Something was expected; even the children were strangely still, and whenever one of the pet birds strayed in at the open door, uttering a little plaintive note, it was chased out again, but without a sound. At length Runi straightened himself on his seat and fixed his eyes on me; then cleared his throat and began a long harangue, delivered in the loud,

monotonous sing-song which I knew so well and which meant that the occasion was an important one. And as is usual in such efforts, the same thought and expressions were used again and again, and yet again, with dull, angry insistence. The orator of Guayana to be impressive must be long, however little he may have to say. Strange as it may seem, I listened critically to him, not without a feeling of scorn at his lower intelligence. But I was easier in my mind now. From the very fact of his addressing such a speech to me I was convinced that he wished not to take my life, and would not do so if I could clear myself of the suspicion of treachery.

I was a white man, he said, they were Indians; nevertheless they had treated me well. They had fed and sheltered me. They had done a great deal for me: they had taught me the use of the zabatana, and had promised to make one for me, asking for nothing in return. They had also promised me a wife. How had I treated them? I had deserted them, going away secretly to a distance, leaving them in doubt as to my intentions. How could they tell why I had gone, and where? They had an enemy. Managa was his name; he and his people hated them; I knew that he wished them evil; I knew where to find him, for they had told me. That was what they thought when I suddenly left them. Now I returned to them, saying that I had been to Riolama. He knew where Riolama was, although he had never been there: it was so far. Why did I go to Riolama? It was a bad place. There were Indians there, a few; but they were not good

Indians like those of Parahuari, and would kill a white man. *Had* I gone there? Why had I gone there?

He finished at last, and it was my turn to speak, but he had given me plenty of time, and my reply was ready. "I have heard you," I said. "Your words are good words They are the words of a friend. I am the white man's friend, you say: is he my friend? He went away secretly, saying no word: why did he go without speaking to his friend who had treated him well? Has he been to my enemy Managa? Perhaps he is a friend of my enemy? Where has he been? I must now answer these things, saying true words to my friend. You are an Indian, I am a white man. You do not know all the white man's thoughts. These are the things I wish to tell you. In the white man's country are two kinds of men. There are the rich men, who have all that a man can desire—houses made of stone, full of fine things, fine clothes, fine weapons, fine ornaments; and they have horses, cattle, sheep, dogs—everything they desire. Because they have gold, for with gold the white man buys everything. The other kind of white men are the poor, who have no gold and cannot buy or have anything: they must work hard for the rich man for the little food he gives them, and a rag to cover their nakedness; and if he gives them shelter they have it; if not they must lie down in the rain out of doors. In my own country, a hundred days from here, I was the son of a great chief, who had much gold, and when he died it was all mine, and I was rich. But I had an enemy, one worse than Managa, for he was rich and had many people. And in a war his people overcame mine,

and he took my gold, and all I possessed, making me poor. The Indian kills his enemy, but the white man takes his gold, and that is worse than death. Then I said: I have been a rich man and now I am poor, and must work like a dog for some rich man, for the sake of the little food he will throw me at the end of each day. No, I cannot do it! I will go away and live with the Indians, so that those who have seen me a rich man shall never see me working like a dog for a master, and cry out and mock at me. For the Indians are not like white men: they have no gold; they are not rich and poor; all are alike. One roof covers them from the rain and sun. All have weapons which they make; all kill birds in the forest and catch fish in the rivers; and the women cook the meat and all eat from one pot. And with the Indians, I will be an Indian, and hunt in the forest and eat with them and drink with them. Then I left my country and came here, and lived with you, Runi, and was well treated. And now, why did I go away? This I have now to tell you. After I had been here a certain time I went over there to the forest. You wished me not to go, because of an evil thing, a daughter of the Didi, that lived there; but I feared nothing and went. There I met an old man, who talked to me in the white man's language. He had travelled and seen much, and told me one strange thing. On a mountain at Riolama he told me that he had seen a great lump of gold, as much as a man could carry. And when I heard this I said, 'With the gold I could return to my country, and buy weapons for myself and all my people and go to war with my enemy and deprive him of all his possessions

and serve him as he served me.' I asked the old man to take me to Riolama; and when he had consented I went away from here without saying a word, so as not to be prevented. It is far to Riolama, and I had no weapons; but I feared nothing. I said, 'If I must fight I must fight, and if I must be killed I must be killed.' But when I got to Riolama I found no gold. There was only a yellow stone which the old man had mistaken for gold. It was yellow, like gold, but it would buy nothing. Therefore I came back to Parahuari again, to my friend; and if he is angry with me still because I went away without informing him, let him say, 'Go and seek elsewhere for a new friend, for I am your friend no longer.'"

I concluded thus boldly, because I did not wish him to know that I had suspected him of harbouring any sinister designs, or that I looked on our quarrel as a very serious one. When I had finished speaking he emitted a sound which expressed neither approval nor disapproval, but only the fact that he had heard me. But I was satisfied. His expression had undergone a favourable change; it was less grim. After a while he remarked, with a peculiar twitching of the mouth which might have developed into a smile, "The white man will do much to get gold. You walked twenty days to see a yellow stone that would buy nothing." It was fortunate that he took this view of the case, which was flattering to his Indian nature, and perhaps touched his sense of the ludicrous. At all events, he said nothing to discredit my story, to which they had all listened with profound interest.

From that time it seemed to be tacitly agreed to let

bygones be bygones; and I could see that as the dangerous feeling that had threatened my life diminished the old pleasure they had once found in my company returned. But my feelings towards them did not change, nor could they while that black and terrible suspicion concerning Rima was in my heart. I talked again freely with them, as if there had been no break in the old friendly relations. If they watched me furtively whenever I went out of doors I affected not to see it. I set to work to repair my rude guitar, which had been broken in my absence, and studied to show them a cheerful countenance. But when alone, or in my hammock, hidden from their eyes, free to look into my own heart, then I was conscious that something new and strange had come into my life; that a new nature, black and implacable, had taken the place of the old. And sometimes it was hard to conceal this fury that burnt in me; sometimes I felt an impulse to spring like a tiger on one of the Indians, to hold him fast by the throat until the secret I wished to learn was forced from his lips, then to dash his brains out against the stone. But they were many, and there was no choice but to be cautious and patient if I wished to outwit them with a cunning superior to their own.

Three days after my arrival at the village, Kua-kó returned with his companion. I greeted him with affected warmth, but was really pleased that he was back, believing that if the Indians knew anything of Rima he among them all would be most likely to tell it.

Kua-kó appeared to have brought some important news, which he discussed with Runi and the others; and on the

following day I noticed that preparations for an expedition were in progress. Spears and bows and arrows were got ready, but not blow-pipes, and I knew by this that the expedition would not be a hunting one. Having discovered so much, also that only four men were going out, I called Kua-kó aside and begged him to let me go with them. He seemed pleased at the proposal, and at once repeated it to Runi, who considered for a little and then consented.

By-and-by he said, touching his bow, "You cannot fight with our weapons; what will you do if we meet an enemy?"

I smiled and returned that I would not run away. All I wished to show him was that his enemies were my enemies, that I was ready to fight for my friend.

He was pleased at my words, and said no more and gave me no weapons. Next morning, however, when we set out before daylight, I made the discovery that he was carrying my revolver fastened to his waist. He had concealed it carefully under the one simple garment he wore, but it bulged slightly, and so the secret was betrayed. I had never believed that he had lost it, and I was convinced that he took it now with the object of putting it into my hands at the last moment in case of meeting with an enemy.

From the village we travelled in a north-westerly direction, and before noon camped in a grove of dwarf trees, where we remained until the sun was low, then continued our walk through a rather barren country. At night we camped again beside a small stream, only a few

inches deep, and after a meal of smoked meat and parched maize prepared to sleep till dawn on the next day.

Sitting by the fire I resolved to make a first attempt to discover from Kua-kó anything concerning Rima which might be known to him. Instead of lying down when the others did I remained seated, my guardian also sitting —no doubt waiting for me to lie down first. Presently I moved nearer to him and began a conversation in a low voice, anxious not to rouse the attention of the other men.

"Once you said that Oolava would be given to me for a wife," I began. "Some day I shall want a wife."

He nodded approval, and remarked sententiously that the desire to possess a wife was common to all men.

"What has been left to me?" I said despondingly and spreading out my hands. "My pistol gone, and did I not give Runi the tinder-box, and the little box with a cock painted on it to you? I had no return—not even the blow-pipe. How, then, can I get me a wife?"

He, like the others—dull-witted savage that he was—had come to the belief that I was incapable of the cunning and duplicity they practised. I could not see a green parrot sitting silent and motionless amidst the green foliage as they could; I had not their preternatural keenness of sight; and, in like manner, to deceive with lies and false seeming was their faculty and not mine. He fell readily into the trap. My return to practical subjects pleased him. He bade me hope that Oolava might yet be mine in spite of my poverty. It was not always necessary to have things to get a wife: to be able to maintain her was enough; some day I would be like

one of themselves, able to kill animals and catch fish. Besides, did not Runi wish to keep me with them for other reasons? But he could not keep me wifeless. I could do much: I could sing and make music; I was brave and feared nothing; I could teach the children to fight.

He did not say, however, that I could teach anything to one of his years and attainments.

I protested that he gave me too much praise, that they were just as brave. Did they not show a courage equal to mine by going every day to hunt in that wood which was inhabited by the daughter of the Didi?

I came to this subject with fear and trembling, but he took it quietly. He shook his head, and then all at once began to tell me how they first came to go there to hunt. He said that a few days after I had secretly disappeared, two men and a woman, returning home from a distant place where they had been on a visit to a relation, stopped at the village. These travellers related that two days' journey from Ytaioa they had met three persons travelling in an opposite direction: an old man with a white beard, followed by two yellow dogs, a young man in a big cloak, and a strange-looking girl. Thus it came to be known that I had left the wood with the old man and the daughter of the Didi. It was great news to them, for they did not believe that we had any intention of returning, and at once they began to hunt in the wood, and went there every day, killing birds, monkeys, and other animals in numbers.

His words had begun to excite me greatly, but I

studied to appear calm, and only slightly interested, so as to draw him on to say more.

"Then we returned," I said at last. "But only two of us, and not together. I left the old man on the road, and *she* left us in Riolama. She went away from us into the mountains—who knows whither!"

"But she came back!" he returned, with a gleam of devilish satisfaction in his eyes that made the blood run cold in my veins.

It was hard to dissemble still, to tempt him to say something that would madden me! "No, no," I answered, after considering his words. "She feared to return; she went away to hide herself in the great mountains beyond Riolama. She could not come back."

"But she came back!" he persisted, with that triumphant gleam in his eyes once more. Under my cloak my hand had clutched my knife-handle, but I strove hard against the fierce, almost maddening impulse to pluck it out and bury it, quick as lightning, in his accursed throat.

He continued: "Seven days before you returned we saw her in the wood. We were always expecting, watching, always afraid; and when hunting we were three and four together. On that day I and three others saw her. It was in an open place, where the trees are big and wide apart. We started up and chased her when she ran from us, but feared to shoot. And in one moment she climbed up into a small tree, then, like a monkey, passed from its highest branches into a big tree. We could not see her there, but she was there in the big tree, for there was

no other tree near—no way of escape. Three of us sat down to watch, and the other went back to the village. He was long gone; we were just going to leave the tree, fearing that she would do us some injury, when he came back, and with him all the others, men, women, and children. They brought axes and knives. Then Runi said, 'Let no one shoot an arrow into the tree thinking to hit her, for the arrow would be caught in her hand and thrown back at him. We must burn her in the tree; there is no way to kill her except by fire.' Then we went round and round looking up, but could see nothing; and someone said, She has escaped, flying like a bird from the tree; but Runi answered that fire would show. So we cut down the small tree, and lopped the branches off and heaped them round the big trunk. Then, at a distance, we cut down ten more small trees, and afterwards, further away, ten more, and then others, and piled them all round, tree after tree, until the pile reached as far from the trunk as that," and here he pointed to a bush forty to fifty yards from where we sat.

The feeling with which I had listened to this recital had become intolerable. The sweat ran from me in streams; I shivered like a person in a fit of ague, and clenched my teeth together to prevent them from rattling. "I must drink," I said, cutting him short and rising to my feet. He also rose, but did not follow me, when, with uncertain steps, I made my way to the waterside, which was ten or twelve yards away. Lying prostrate on my chest, I took a long draught of clear cold water, and held my face for a few moments in the current. It sent

a chill through me, drying my wet skin, and bracing me for the concluding part of the hideous narrative. Slowly I stepped back to the fireside and sat down again, while he resumed his old place at my side.

"You burnt the tree down," I said. "Finish telling me now and let me sleep—my eyes are heavy."

"Yes. While the men cut and brought trees, the women and children gathered dry stuff in the forest and brought it in their arms and piled it round. Then they set fire to it on all sides, laughing and shouting, 'Burn, burn, daughter of the Didi!' At length all the lower branches of the big tree were on fire, and the trunk was on fire, but above it was still green, and we could see nothing. But the flames went up higher and higher with a great noise; and at last from the top of the tree, out of the green leaves, came a great cry, like the cry of a bird, 'Abel! Abel!' and then looking we saw something fall; through leaves and smoke and flame it fell like a great white bird killed with an arrow and falling to the earth, and fell into the flames beneath. And it was the daughter of the Didi, and she was burnt to ashes like a moth in the flames of a fire, and no one has ever heard or seen her since."

It was well for me that he spoke rapidly, and finished quickly. Even before he had quite concluded I drew my cloak round my face and stretched myself out. And I suppose that he at once followed my example, but I had grown blind and deaf to outward things just then. My heart no longer throbbed violently; it fluttered and seemed to grow feebler and feebler in its action: I

remember that there was a dull, rushing sound in my ears, that I gasped for breath, that my life seemed ebbing away. After these horrible sensations had passed, I remained quiet for about half an hour; and during this time the picture of that last act in the hateful tragedy grew more and more distinct and vivid in my mind, until I seemed to be actually gazing on it, that my ears were filled with the hissing and crackling of the fire, the exultant shouts of the savages, and above all the last piercing cry of "Abel! Abel!" from the cloud of burning foliage. I could not endure it longer, and rose at last to my feet. I glanced at Kua-kó lying two or three yards away, and he, like the others, was, or appeared to be, in a deep sleep; he was lying on his back, and his dark firelit face looked as still and unconscious as a face of stone. Now was my chance to escape—if to escape was my wish. Yes; for I now possessed the coveted knowledge, and nothing more was to be gained by keeping with my deadly enemies. And now, most fortunately for me, they had brought me far on the road to that place of the five hills where Managa lived—Managa, whose name had been often in my mind since my return to Parahuari. Glancing away from Kua-kó's still stone-like face, I caught sight of that pale solitary star which Runi had pointed out to me low down in the north-western sky when I had asked him where his enemy lived. In that direction we had been travelling since leaving the village; surely if I walked all night by to-morrow I could reach Managa's hunting-ground, and be safe and think over what I had heard and on what I had to do.

I moved softly away a few steps, then thinking that it would be well to take a spear in my hand, I turned back, and was surprised and startled to notice that Kua-kó had moved in the interval. He had turned over on his side, and his face was now towards me. His eyes appeared closed, but he might be only feigning sleep, and I dared not go back to pick up the spear. After a moment's hesitation I moved on again, and after a second glance back and seeing that he did not stir, I waded cautiously across the stream, walked softly twenty or thirty yards, and then began to run. At intervals I paused to listen for a moment; and presently I heard a pattering sound as of footsteps coming swiftly after me. I instantly concluded that Kua-kó had been awake all the time watching my movements, and that he was now following me. I now put forth my whole speed, and while thus running could distinguish no sound. That he would miss me, for it was very dark, although with a starry sky above, was my only hope; for with no weapon except my knife my chances would be small indeed should he overtake me. Besides, he had no doubt roused the others before starting, and they would be close behind. There were no bushes in that place to hide myself in and let them pass me; and presently, to make matters worse, the character of the soil changed, and I was running over level clayey ground, so white with a salt efflorescence that a dark object moving on it would show conspicuously at a distance. Here I paused to look back and listen, when distinctly came the sound of footsteps, and the next moment I made out the vague form of an Indian advanc-

ing at a rapid rate of speed and with his uplifted spear in his hand. In the brief pause I had made he had advanced almost to within hurling distance of me, and turning, I sped on again, throwing off my cloak to ease my flight. The next time I looked back he was still in sight, but not so near; he had stopped to pick up my cloak, which would be his now, and this had given me a slight advantage. I fled on, and had continued running for a distance perhaps of fifty yards when an object rushed past me, tearing through the flesh of my left arm close to the shoulder on its way; and not knowing that I was not badly wounded nor how near my pursuer might be, I turned in desperation to meet him, and saw him not above twenty-five yards away, running towards me with something bright in his hand. It was Kua-kó, and after wounding me with his spear he was about to finish me with his knife. O fortunate young savage, after such a victory, and with that noble blue cloth cloak for trophy and covering, what fame and happiness will be yours! A change swift as lightning had come over me, a sudden exultation. I was wounded, but my right hand was sound and clutched a knife as good as his, and we were on an equality. I waited for him calmly. All weakness, grief, despair had vanished, all feelings except a terrible raging desire to spill his accursed blood; and my brain was clear and my nerves like steel, and I remembered with something like laughter our old amusing encounters with rapiers of wood. Ah, that was only making believe and childish play; this was reality. Could any white man, deprived of his treacherous, far-killing weapon,

meet the resolute savage, face to face and foot to foot and equal him with the old primitive weapons? Poor youth, this delusion will cost you dear! It was scarcely an equal contest when he hurled himself against me, with only his savage strength and courage to match my skill; in a few moments he was lying at my feet, pouring out his life blood on that white thirsty plain. From his prostrate form I turned, the wet, red knife in my hand, to meet the others, still thinking that they were on the track and close at hand. Why had he stooped to pick up the cloak if they were not following—if he had not been afraid of losing it? I turned only to receive their spears, to die with my face to them; nor was the thought of death terrible to me; I could die calmly now after killing my first assailant. But had I indeed killed him? I asked, hearing a sound like a groan escape from his lips. Quickly stooping I once more drove my weapon to the hilt in his prostrate form, and when he exhaled a deep sigh, and his frame quivered, and the blood spurted afresh, I experienced a feeling of savage joy. And still no sound of hurrying footsteps came to my listening ears and no vague forms appeared in the darkness. I concluded that he had either left them sleeping or that they had not followed in the right direction. Taking up the cloak, I was about to walk on, when I noticed the spear he had thrown at me lying where it had fallen some yards away, and picking that up also, I went on once more, still keeping the guiding star before me.

CHAPTER XX

THAT good fight had been to me like a draught of wine, and made me for a while oblivious of my loss and of the pain from my wound. But the glow and feeling of exultation did not last: the lacerated flesh smarted; I was weak from loss of blood, and oppressed with sensations of fatigue. If my foes had appeared on the scene they would have made an easy conquest of me; but they came not, and I continued to walk on, slowly and painfully, pausing often to rest.

At last, recovering somewhat from my faint condition, and losing all fear of being overtaken, my sorrow revived in full force, and thought returned to madden me.

Alas! this bright being, like no other in its divine brightness, so long in the making, now no more than a dead leaf, a little dust, lost and forgotten for ever—O pitiless! O cruel!

But I knew it all before—this law of nature and of necessity, against which all revolt is idle: often had the remembrance of it filled me with ineffable melancholy; only now it seemed cruel beyond all cruelty.

Not nature the instrument, not the keen sword that cuts into the bleeding tissues, but the hand that wields it

—the unseen unknown something, or person, that manifests itself in the horrible workings of nature.

"Did you know, beloved, at the last, in that intolerable heat, in that moment of supreme anguish, that *he* is unlistening, unhelpful as the stars, that you cried not to him? To me was your cry: but your poor, frail fellow-creature was not there to save, or, failing that, to cast himself into the flames and perish with you, hating God."

Thus, in my insufferable pain, I spoke aloud; alone in that solitary place, a bleeding fugitive in the dark night, looking up at the stars I cursed the Author of my being and called on Him to take back the abhorred gift of life.

Yet, according to my philosophy, how vain it was! All my bitterness and hatred and defiance were as empty, as ineffectual, as utterly futile, as are the supplications of the meek worshipper, and no more than the whisper of a leaf, the light whirr of an insect's wing. Whether I loved Him who was over all, as when I thanked Him on my knees for guiding me to where I had heard so sweet and mysterious a melody, or hated and defied Him as now, it all came from Him—love and hate, good and evil.

But I know—I knew then—that in one thing my philosophy was false, that it was not the whole truth; that though my cries did not touch nor come near Him they would yet hurt me; and, just as a prisoner maddened at his unjust fate beats against the stone walls of his cell until he falls back bruised and bleeding to the floor, so

did I wilfully bruise my own soul, and knew that those wounds I gave myself would not heal.

Of that night, the beginning of the blackest period of my life, I shall say no more; and over subsequent events I shall pass quickly.

Morning found me at a distance of many miles from the scene of my duel with the Indian, in a broken, hilly country, varied with savannah and open forest. I was well-nigh spent with my long march, and felt that unless food was obtained before many hours my situation would be indeed desperate. With labour I managed to climb to the summit of a hill about three hundred feet high, in order to survey the surrounding country, and found that it was one of a group of five, and conjectured that these were the five hills of Uritay, and that I was in the neighbourhood of Managa's village. Coming down I proceeded to the next hill, which was higher; and before reaching it came to a stream in a narrow valley dividing the hills, and proceeding along its banks in search of a crossing-place, I came full in sight of the settlement sought for. As I approached people were seen moving hurriedly about: and by the time I arrived, walking slowly and painfully, seven or eight men were standing before the village, some with spears in their hands, the women and children behind them, all staring curiously at me. Drawing near I cried out in a somewhat feeble voice that I was seeking for Managa; whereupon a grey-haired man stepped forth, spear in hand, and replied that he was Managa, and demanded to know why I sought him. I told him a part of my story, enough to show that I had a deadly feud

with Runi, that I had escaped from him after killing one of his people.

I was taken in and supplied with food; my wound was examined and dressed; and then I was permitted to lie down and sleep, while Managa, with half a dozen of his people, hurriedly started to visit the scene of my fight with Kua-kó, not only to verify my story, but partly also with the hope of meeting Runi. I did not see him again until the next morning, when he informed me that he had found the spot where I had been overtaken, that the dead man had been discovered by the others and carried back towards Parahuari. He had followed the trace for some distance, and he was satisfied that Runi had come thus far in the first place only with the intention of spying on him.

My arrival, and the strange tidings I had brought, had thrown the village into a great commotion; it was evident that from that time Managa lived in constant apprehension of a sudden attack from his old enemy. This gave me great satisfaction; it was my study to keep the feeling alive, and, more than that, to drop continual hints of his enemy's secret murderous purpose, until he was wrought up to a kind of frenzy of mingled fear and rage. And being of a suspicious and somewhat truculent temper, he one day all at once turned on me as the immediate cause of his miserable state, suspecting perhaps that I only wished to make an instrument of him. But I was strangely bold and careless of danger then, and only mocked at his rage, telling him proudly that I feared him not; that Runi, his mortal enemy and mine, feared

not him but me; that Runi knew perfectly well where I had taken refuge and would not venture to make his meditated attack while I remained in his village, but would wait for my departure. "Kill me, Managa," I cried, smiting my chest as I stood facing him. "Kill me, and the result will be that he will come upon you unawares and murder you all, as he has resolved to do sooner or later."

After that speech he glared at me in silence, then flung down the spear he had snatched up in his sudden rage and stalked out of the house and into the wood. but before long he was back again seated in his old place, brooding on my words with a face black as night.

It is painful to recall that secret dark chapter of my life—that period of moral insanity. But I wish not to be a hypocrite, conscious or unconscious, to delude myself or another with this plea of insanity. My mind was very clear just then; past and present were clear to me; the future clearest of all: I could measure the extent of my action and speculate on its future effect, and my sense of right or wrong—of individual responsibility—was more vivid than at any other period of my life. Can I even say that I was blinded by passion? Driven, perhaps, but certainly not blinded. For no reaction, or submission, had followed on that furious revolt against the unknown being, personal or not, that is behind nature, in whose existence I believed. I was still in revolt: I would hate Him, and show my hatred by being like Him, as He appears to us reflected in that mirror of Nature. Had He given me good gifts—the sense of right and wrong and sweet

humanity? The beautiful sacred flower He had caused to grow in me I would crush ruthlessly; its beauty and fragrance and grace would be dead for ever; there was nothing evil, nothing cruel and contrary to my nature, that I would not be guilty of, glorying in my guilt. This was not the temper of a few days: I remained for close upon two months at Managa's village, never repenting nor desisting in my efforts to induce the Indians to join me in that most barbarous adventure on which my heart was set.

I succeeded in the end: it would have been strange if I had not. The horrible details need not be given. Managa did not wait for his enemy, but fell on him unexpectedly, an hour after nightfall in his own village. If I had really been insane during those two months, if some cloud had been on me, some demoniacal force dragging me on, the cloud and insanity vanished and the constraint was over in one moment, when that hellish enterprise was completed. It was the sight of an old woman, lying where she had been struck down, the fire of the blazing house lighting her wide-open glassy eyes and white hair dabbled in blood, which suddenly, as by a miracle, wrought this change in my brain. For they were all dead at last, old and young, all who had lighted the fire round that great green tree in which Rima had taken refuge, who had danced round the blaze, shouting, "Burn! burn!"

At the moment my glance fell on that prostrate form, I paused and stood still, trembling like a person struck with a sudden pang in the heart, who thinks that his

last moment has come to him unawares. After a while I slunk away out of the great circle of firelight into the thick darkness beyond. Instinctively I turned towards the forest across the savannah—my forest again; and fled away from the noise and the sight of flames, never pausing until I found myself within the black shadow of the trees. Into the deeper blackness of the interior I dared not venture: on the border I paused to ask myself what I did there alone in the night time. Sitting down I covered my face with my hands as if to hide it more effectually than it could be hidden by night and the forest shadows. What horrible thing—what calamity that frightened my soul to think of, had fallen on me? The revulsion of feeling, the unspeakable horror, the remorse, was more than I could bear. I started up with a cry of anguish, and would have slain myself to escape at that moment; but Nature is not always and utterly cruel, and on this occasion she came to my aid. Consciousness forsook me, and I lived not again until the light of early morning was in the east; then found myself lying on the wet herbage—wet with rain that had lately fallen. My physical misery was now so great that it prevented me from dwelling on the scenes witnessed on the previous evening. Nature was again merciful in this. I only remembered that it was necessary to hide myself, in case the Indians should be still in the neighbourhood and pay the wood a visit. Slowly and painfully I crept away into the forest, and there sat for several hours, scarcely thinking at all, in a half-stupefied condition. At noon the sun shone out and dried the wood. I felt

no hunger, only a vague sense of bodily misery, and with it the fear that if I left my hiding-place I might meet some human creature face to face. This fear prevented me from stirring until the twilight came, when I crept forth and made my way to the border of the forest, to spend the night there. Whether sleep visited me during the dark hours or not I cannot say: day and night my condition seemed the same; I experienced only a dull sensation of utter misery which seemed in spirit and flesh alike, an inability to think clearly, or for more than a few moments consecutively, about anything. Scenes in which I had been principal actor came and went, as in a dream when the will slumbers: now with devilish ingenuity and persistence I was working on Managa's mind; now standing motionless in the forest listening for that sweet, mysterious melody; now staring aghast at old Cla-cla's wide-open glassy eyes and white hair dabbled in blood; then suddenly, in the cave at Riolama, I was fondly watching the slow return of life and colour to Rima's still face.

When morning came again I felt so weak that a vague fear of sinking down and dying of hunger at last roused me and sent me forth in quest of food. I moved slowly and my eyes were dim to see, but I knew so well where to seek for small morsels—small edible roots and leaf-stalks, berries, and drops of congealed gum—that it would have been strange in that rich forest if I had not been able to discover something to stay my famine. It was little, but it sufficed for the day. Once more Nature was merciful to me; for that diligent seeking among the concealing

leaves left no interval for thought; every chance morsel gave a momentary pleasure, and as I prolonged my search my steps grew firmer, the dimness passed from my eyes. I was more forgetful of self, more eager, and like a wild animal with no thought or feeling beyond its immediate wants. Fatigued at the end, I fell asleep as soon as darkness brought my busy rambles to a close, and did not wake until another morning dawned.

My hunger was extreme now. The wailing notes of a pair of small birds, persistently flitting round me, or perched with gaping bills and wings trembling with agitation, served to remind me that it was now breeding-time; also that Rima had taught me to find a small bird's-nest. She found them only to delight her eyes with the sight; but they would be food for me; the crystal and yellow fluid in the gem-like, white or blue or red-speckled shells would help to keep me alive. All day I hunted, listening to every note and cry, watching the motions of every winged thing, and found, besides gums and fruits, over a score of nests containing eggs, mostly of small birds, and although the labour was great and the scratches many, I was well satisfied with the result.

A few days later I found a supply of Haima gum, and eagerly began picking it from the tree; not that it could be used, but the thought of the brilliant light it gave was so strong in my mind that mechanically I gathered it all. The possession of this gum, when night closed round me again, produced in me an intense longing for artificial light and warmth. The darkness was harder than ever to endure. I envied the fireflies their natural

lights, and ran about in the dusk to capture a few and hold them in the hollow of my two hands, for the sake of their cold, fitful flashes. On the following day I wasted two or three hours trying to get fire in the primitive method with dry wood, but failed, and lost much time, and suffered more than ever from hunger in consequence. Yet there was fire in everything; even when I struck at hard wood with my knife sparks were emitted. If I could only arrest those wonderful heat and light-giving sparks! And all at once, as if I had just lighted upon some new, wonderful truth, it occurred to me that with my steel hunting-knife and a piece of flint fire could be obtained. Immediately I set about preparing tinder with dry moss, rotten wood, and wild cotton; and in a short time I had the wished fire, and heaped wood dry and green on it to make it large. I nursed it well, and spent the night beside it; and it also served to roast some huge white grubs which I had found in the rotten wood of a prostrate trunk. The sight of these great grubs had formerly disgusted me; but they tasted good to me now, and stayed my hunger, and that was all I looked for in my wild forest food.

For a long time an undefined feeling prevented me from going near the site of Nuflo's burnt lodge. I went there at last; and the first thing I did was to go all round the fatal spot, cautiously peering into the rank herbage, as if I feared a lurking serpent; and at length, at some distance from the blackened heap, I discovered a human skeleton, and knew it to be Nuflo's. In his day he had been a great armadillo hunter, and these quaint carrion

eaters had no doubt revenged themselves by devouring his flesh when they found him dead—killed by the savages.

Having once returned to this spot of many memories, I could not quit it again; while my wild woodland life lasted here must I have my lair, and being here I could not leave that mournful skeleton above ground. With labour I excavated a pit to bury it; careful not to cut or injure a broad-leafed creeper that had begun to spread itself over the spot; and after refilling the hole I drew the long, trailing stems over the mound.

"Sleep well, old man," said I, when my work was done; and these few words, implying neither censure nor praise, was all the burial service that old Nuflo had from me.

I then visited the spot where the old man, assisted by me, had concealed his provisions before starting for Riolama, and was pleased to find that it had not been discovered by the Indians. Besides the store of tobacco-leaf, maize, pumpkin, potatoes, and cassava-bread, and the cooking utensils, I found among other things a chopper—a great acquisition, since with it I would be able to cut down small palms and bamboos to make myself a hut.

The possession of a supply of food left me time for many things: time in the first place to make my own conditions; doubtless after them there would be further progression on the old lines—luxuries added to necessaries; a healthful, fruitful life of thought and action combined; and at the last a peaceful, contemplative old age.

I cleared away ashes and rubbish, and marked out the very spot where Rima's separate bower had been for my habitation, which I intended to make small. In five days

it was finished; then after lighting a fire, I stretched myself out in my dry bed of moss and leaves with a feeling that was almost triumphant. Let the rain now fall in torrents, putting out the firefly's lamp; let the wind and thunder roar their loudest, and the lightnings smite the earth with intolerable light, frightening the poor monkeys in their wet, leafy habitations, little would I heed it all on my dry bed, under my dry, palm-leaf thatch, with glorious fire to keep me company and protect me from my ancient enemy, Darkness.

From that first sleep under shelter I woke refreshed, and was not driven by the cruel spur of hunger into the wet forest. The wished time had come of rest from labour, of leisure for thought. Resting here, just where she had rested, night by night clasping a visionary mother in her arms, whispering tenderest words in a visionary ear, I too now clasped her in my arms—a visionary Rima. How different the nights had seemed when I was without shelter, before I had rediscovered fire! How had I endured it? That strange ghostly gloom of the woods at night-time full of innumerable strange shapes; still and dark, yet with something seen at times moving amidst them, dark and vague and strange also—an owl perhaps, or bat, or great winged moth, or nightjar. Nor had I any choice then but to listen to the night-sounds of the forest; and they were various as the day-sounds, and for every day-sound, from the faintest lisping and softest trill to the deep boomings and piercing cries, there was an analogue; always with something mysterious, unreal, in its tone, something proper to the night. They were ghostly sounds,

uttered by the ghosts of dead animals; they were a hundred different things by turns, but always with a meaning in them, which I vainly strove to catch—something to be interpreted only by a sleeping faculty in us, lightly sleeping, and now, now on the very point of awaking!

Now the gloom and the mystery was shut out; now I had that which stood in the place of pleasure to me, and was more than pleasure. It was a mournful rapture to lie awake now, wishing not for sleep and oblivion, hating the thought of daylight that would come at last to drown and scare away my vision. To be with Rima again—my lost Rima recovered—mine, mine at last! No longer the old vexing doubt now—"You are you and I am I—why is it?"—the question asked when our souls were near together, like two raindrops side by side, drawing irresistibly nearer, ever nearer: for now they had touched and were not two, but one inseparable drop, crystallised beyond change, not to be disintegrated by time, nor shattered by death's blow, nor resolved by any alchemy.

I had other company besides this unfailing vision, and the bright dancing fire that talked to me in its fantastic fire language. It was my custom to secure the door well on retiring: grief had perhaps chilled my blood, for I suffered less from heat than from cold at this period, and the fire seemed grateful all night long; I was also anxious to exclude all small winged and creeping night-wanderers. But to exclude them entirely proved impossible: through a dozen invisible chinks they would find their way to me; also some entered by day to lie concealed until after night-

fall. A monstrous hairy hermit spider found an asylum in a dusky corner of the hut, under the thatch, and day after day he was there, all day long, sitting close and motionless; but at dark he invariably disappeared—who knows on what murderous errand! His hue was a deep dead-leaf yellow, with a black and grey pattern, borrowed from some wild cat; and so large was he that his great outspread hairy legs, radiating from the flat disc of his body, would have covered a man's open hand. It was easy to see him in my small interior; often in the night-time my eyes would stray to his corner, never to encounter that strange hairy figure; but daylight failed not to bring him. He troubled me; but now, for Rima's sake, I could slay no living thing except from motives of hunger. I had it in my mind to injure him—to strike off one of his legs, which would not be missed much, as they were many—so as to make him go away and return no more to so inhospitable a place. But courage failed me. He might come stealthily back at night to plunge his long, crooked falces into my throat, poisoning my blood with fever and delirium and black death. So I left him alone, and glanced furtively and fearfully at him, hoping that he had not divined any thoughts; thus we lived on unsocially together. More companionable, but still in an uncomfortable way, were the large crawling, running insects—crickets, beetles, and others. They were shapely and black and polished, and ran about here and there on the floor, just like intelligent little horseless carriages; then they would pause with their immovable eyes fixed on me, seeing, or in some mysterious way divining my presence; their

pliant horns waving up and down, like delicate instruments used to test the air. Centipedes and millipedes in dozens came too, and were not welcome. I feared not their venom, but it was a weariness to see them; for they seemed no living things, but the vertebræ of snakes and eels and long slim fishes, dead and desiccated, made to move mechanically over walls and floor by means of some jugglery of nature. I grew skilful at picking them up with a pair of pliant green twigs, to thrust them forth into the outer darkness.

One night a moth fluttered in and alighted on my hand as I sat by the fire, causing me to hold my breath as I gazed on it. Its fore wings were pale grey, with shadings dark and light written all over in finest characters with some twilight mystery or legend; but the round underwings were clear amber-yellow, veined like a leaf with red and purple veins; a thing of such exquisite chaste beauty that the sight of it gave me a sudden shock of pleasure. Very soon it flew up circling about, and finally lighted on the palm-leaf thatch directly over the fire. The heat, I thought, would soon drive it from the spot; and, rising, I opened the door, so that it might find its way out again into its own cool, dark, flowery world. And standing by the open door I turned and addressed it: "O night-wanderer of the pale, beautiful wings, go forth, and should you by chance meet her somewhere in the shadowy depths, revisiting her old haunts, be my messenger——" Thus much had I spoken, when the frail thing loosened its hold to fall without a flutter, straight and swift, into the white blaze beneath. I sprang forward with a shriek, and stood staring into the fire, my

whole frame trembling with a sudden, terrible emotion. Even thus had Rima fallen—fallen from the great height —into the flames that instantly consumed her beautiful flesh and bright spirit! O cruel Nature!

A moth that perished in the flame; an indistinct faint sound; a dream in the night; the semblance of a shadowy form moving mist-like in the twilight gloom of the forest, would suddenly bring back a vivid memory, the old anguish, to break for a while the calm of that period. It was calm then after the storm. Nevertheless, my health deteriorated. I ate little and slept little and grew thin and weak. When I looked down on the dark, glassy forest pool, where Rima would look no more to see herself so much better than in the small mirror of her lover's pupil, it showed me a gaunt, ragged man with a tangled mass of black hair falling over his shoulders, the bones of his face showing through the dead-looking, sun-parched skin, the sunken eyes with a gleam in them that was like insanity.

To see this reflection had a strangely disturbing effect on me. A torturing voice would whisper in my ear: "Yes, you are evidently going mad. By-and-by you will rush howling through the forest, only to drop down at last and die: and no person will ever find and bury *your* bones. Old Nuflo was more fortunate in that he perished first."

"A lying voice!" I retorted in sudden anger. "My faculties were never keener than now. Not a fruit can ripen but I find it. If a small bird darts by with a feather or straw in its bill I mark its flight, and it will be a lucky bird if I do not find its nest in the end.

Could a savage born in the forest do more? He would starve where I find food!"

"Ah, yes, there is nothing wonderful in that," answered the voice. "The stranger from a cold country suffers less from the heat, when days are hottest, than the Indian who knows no other climate. But mark the result! The stranger dies, while the Indian, sweating and gasping for breath, survives. In like manner the low-minded savage, cut off from all human fellowship, keeps his faculties to the end, while your finer brain proves your ruin."

I cut from a tree a score of long, blunt thorns, tough and black as whalebone, and drove them through a strip of wood in which I had burnt a row of holes to receive them, and made myself a comb, and combed out my long, tangled hair to improve my appearance.

"It is not the tangled condition of your hair," persisted the voice, "but your eyes, so wild and strange in their expression, that show the approach of madness. Make your locks as smooth as you like, and add a garland of those scarlet, star-shaped blossoms hanging from the bush behind you—crown yourself as you crowned old Cla-cla—but the crazed look will remain just the same."

And being no longer able to reply, rage and desperation drove me to an act which only seemed to prove that the hateful voice had prophesied truly. Taking up a stone I hurled it down on the water to shatter the image I saw there, as if it had been no faithful reflection of myself, but a travesty, cunningly made of enamelled clay or some other material, and put there by some malicious enemy to mock me

CHAPTER XXI

MANY days had passed since the hut was made—how many may not be known, since I notched no stick and knotted no cord—yet never in my rambles in the wood had I seen that desolate ash-heap where the fire had done its work. Nor had I looked for it. On the contrary, my wish was never to see it, and the fear of coming accidentally upon it made me keep to the old familiar paths. But at length, one night, while thinking of Rima's fearful end, it all at once occurred to me that the hated savage, whose blood I had shed on the white savannah, might have only been practising his natural deceit when he told me that most pitiful story. If that were so—if he had been prepared with a fictitious account of her death to meet my questions—then Rima might still exist: lost, perhaps, wandering in some distant place, exposed to perils day and night, and unable to find her way back, but living still! Living! her heart on fire with the hope of reunion with me, cautiously threading her way through the undergrowth of immeasurable forests; spying out the distant villages and hiding herself from the sight of all men, as she knew so well how to hide; studying the outlines of distant mountains, to recognise some familiar landmark at last, and so find her

way back to the old wood once more! Even now, while I sat there idly musing, she might be somewhere in the wood—somewhere near me; but after so long an absence full of apprehension, waiting in concealment for what to-morrow's light might show.

I started up and replenished the fire with trembling hands, then set the door open to let the welcoming radiance stream out into the wood. But Rima had done more; going out into the black forest in the pitiless storm, she had found and led me home. Could I do less! I was quickly out in the shadows of the wood. Surely it was more than a mere hope that made my heart beat so wildly! How could a sensation so strangely sudden, so irresistible in its power, possess me unless she were living and near? Can it be, can it be that we shall meet again? To look again into your divine eyes—to hold you again in my arms at last! I so changed—so different! But the old love remains; and of all that has happened in your absence I shall tell you nothing—not one word; all shall be forgotten now—sufferings, madness, crime, remorse! Nothing shall ever vex you again—not Nuflo, who vexed you every day; for he is dead now—murdered, only I shall not say that—and I have decently buried his poor old sinful bones. We alone together in the wood—*our* wood now! The sweet old days again; for I know that you would not have it different, nor would I.

Thus I talked to myself, mad with the thoughts of the joy that would soon be mine; and at intervals I stood still and made the forest echo with my calls. "Rima! Rima!" I called again and again, and waited for some

response; and heard only the familiar night-sounds—voices of insect and bird and tinkling tree-frog, and a low murmur in the topmost foliage, moved by some light breath of wind unfelt below. I was drenched with dew, bruised and bleeding from falls in the dark, and from rocks and thorns and rough branches, but had felt nothing: gradually the excitement burnt itself out; I was hoarse with shouting and ready to drop down with fatigue, and hope was dead: and at length I crept back to my hut, to cast myself on my grass bed and sink into a dull, miserable, desponding stupor.

But on the following morning I was out once more, determined to search the forest well; since, if no evidence of the great fire Kua-kó had described to me existed, it would still be possible to believe that he had lied to me, and that Rima lived. I searched all day and found nothing; but the area was large, and to search it thoroughly would require several days.

On the third day I discovered the fatal spot, and knew that never again would I behold Rima in the flesh, that my last hope had indeed been a vain one. There could be no mistake: just such an open place as the Indian had pictured to me was here, with giant trees standing apart; while one tree stood killed and blackened by fire, surrounded by a huge heap, sixty or seventy yards across, of prostrate charred tree-trunks and ashes. Here and there slender plants had sprung up through the ashes, and the omnipresent small-leaved creepers were beginning to throw their pale green embroidery over the blackened trunks. I looked long at the vast funeral tree that had

a buttressed girth of not less than fifty feet, and rose straight as a ship's mast, with its top about a hundred and fifty feet from the earth. What a distance to fall, through burning leaves and smoke, like a white bird shot dead with a poisoned arrow, swift and straight into that sea of flame below! How cruel imagination was to turn that desolate ash-heap, in spite of feathery foliage and embroidery of creepers, into roaring leaping flames again —to bring those dead savages back, men, women, and children—even the little ones I had played with—to set them yelling around me, "Burn! burn!" Oh, no, this damnable spot must not be her last resting-place! If the fire had not utterly consumed her, bones as well as sweet tender flesh, shrivelling her like a frail white-winged moth into the finest white ashes, mixed inseparably with the ashes of stems and leaves innumerable, then whatever remained of her must be conveyed elsewhere to be with me, to mingle with my ashes at last.

Having resolved to sift and examine the entire heap, I at once set about my task. If she had climbed into the central highest branch, and had fallen straight, then she would have dropped into the flames not far from the roots; and so to begin I made a path to the trunk, and when darkness overtook me I had worked all round the tree, in a width of three to four yards, without discovering any remains. At noon on the following day I found the skeleton, or, at all events, the larger bones, rendered so fragile by the fierce heat they had been subjected to, that they fell to pieces when handled. But I was careful—how careful!—to save these last sacred relics, all that was

now left of Rima!—kissing each white fragment as I lifted it, and gathering them all in my old frayed cloak, spread out to receive them. And when I had recovered them all, even to the smallest, I took my treasure home.

Another storm had shaken my soul, and had been succeeded by a second calm, which was more complete and promised to be more enduring than the first. But it was no lethargic calm; my brain was more active than ever; and by-and-by it found a work for my hands to do, of such a character as to distinguish me from all other forest hermits, fugitives from their fellows, in that savage land. The calcined bones I had rescued were kept in one of the big, rudely shaped, half-burnt earthen jars, which Nuflo had used for storing grain and other food-stuff. It was of a wood-ash colour; and after I had given up my search for the peculiar fine clay he had used in its manufacture—for it had been in my mind to make a more shapely funeral urn myself—I set to work to ornament its surface. A portion of each day was given to this artistic labour; and when the surface was covered with a pattern of thorny stems, and a trailing creeper with curving leaf and twining tendril, and pendent bud and blossom, I gave it colour. Purples and black only were used, obtained from the juices of some deeply coloured berries; and when a tint, or shade, or line failed to satisfy me I erased it, to do it again; and this so often that I never completed my work. I might, in the proudly modest spirit of the old sculptors, have inscribed on the vase the words, *Abel was doing this.* For was not my ideal beautiful like theirs, and the best that my art could do only an imperfect copy—a

rude sketch? A serpent was represented wound round the lower portion of the jar, dull-hued, with a chain of irregular black spots or blotches extending along its body: and if any person had curiously examined these spots he would have discovered that every other one was a rudely shaped letter, and that the letters, by being properly divided, made the following words:—

Sin vos y siu dios y mi.

Words that to some might seem wild, even insane in their extravagance, sung by some ancient forgotten poet; or possibly the motto of some love-sick knight-errant, whose passion was consumed to ashes long centuries ago. But not wild nor insane to me, dwelling alone on a vast stony plain in everlasting twilight, where there was no motion, nor any sound; but all things, even trees, ferns, and grasses, were stone. And in that place I had sat for many a thousand years, drawn up and motionless, with stony fingers clasped round my legs, and forehead resting on my knees; and there would I sit, unmoving, immovable, for many a thousand years to come—I, no longer I, in a universe where *she* was not, and God was not.

The days went by, and to others grouped themselves into weeks and months; to me they were only days—not Saturday, Sunday, Monday, but nameless. They were so many and their sum so great, that all my previous life, all the years I had existed before this solitary time, now looked like a small island immeasurably far away, scarcely discernible, in the midst of that endless desolate waste of nameless days.

My stock of provisions had been so long consumed that had forgotten the flavour of pulse and maize and pumpkins and purple and sweet potatoes. For Nuflo's cultivated patch had been destroyed by the savages—not a stem, not a root had they left: and I, like the sorrowful man that broods on his sorrow and the artist who thinks only of his art, had been improvident, and had consumed the seed without putting a portion into the ground. Only wild food, and too little of that, found with much seeking and got with many hurts. Birds screamed at and scolded me; branches bruised and thorns scratched me; and still worse were the angry clouds of waspish things no bigger than flies. Buzz—buzz! Sting—sting! A serpent's tooth has failed to kill me; little do I care for your small drops of fiery venom so that I get at the spoil—grubs and honey. My white bread and purple wine! Once my soul hungered after knowledge; I took delight in fine thoughts finely expressed; I sought them carefully in printed books: now only this vile bodily hunger, this eager seeking for grubs and honey, and ignoble war with little things!

A bad hunter I proved after larger game. Bird and beast despised my snares, which took me so many waking hours at night to invent, so many daylight hours to make. Once, seeing a troop of monkeys high up in the tall trees, I followed and watched them for a long time, thinking how royally I should feast if by some strange unheard-of accident one were to fall disabled to the ground and be at my mercy. But nothing impossible happened, and I had no meat. What meat did I ever have except an occasional fledgling, killed in its cradle.

or a lizard, or small tree-frog detected, in spite of its green colour, among the foliage? I would roast the little green minstrel on the coals. Why not? Why should he live to tinkle on his mandolin and clash his airy cymbals with no appreciative ear to listen? Once I had a different and strange kind of meat; but the starved stomach is not squeamish. I found a serpent coiled up in my way in a small glade, and arming myself with a long stick, I roused him from his siesta, and slew him without mercy. Rima was not there to pluck the rage from my heart and save his evil life. No coral snake this, with slim, tapering body, ringed like a wasp with brilliant colour; but thick and blunt, with lurid scales, blotched with black; also a broad, flat, murderous head, with stony, ice-like, whity-blue eyes, cold enough to freeze a victim's blood in its veins and make it sit still, like some wide-eyed creature carved in stone, waiting for the sharp, inevitable stroke—so swift at last, so long in coming. "O abominable flat head, with icy-cold, human-like, fiend-like eyes, I shall cut you off and throw you away!" And away I flung it, far enough in all conscience; yet I walked home troubled with a fancy that somewhere, somewhere down on the black, wet soil where it had fallen, through all that dense, thorny tangle and millions of screening leaves, the white, lidless, living eyes were following me still, and would always be following me in all my goings and comings and windings about in the forest. And what wonder? For were we not alone together in this dreadful solitude, I and the serpent, eaters of the dust, singled out and cursed above all cattle? *He* would not

have bitten me, and I—faithless cannibal!—had murdered him. That cursed fancy would live on, worming itself into every crevice of my mind; the severed head would grow and grow in the night-time to something monstrous at last, the hellish white lidless eyes increasing to the size of two full moons. "Murderer! murderer!" they would say; "first a murderer of your own fellow-creatures—that was a small crime; but God, our enemy, had made them in His image, and he cursed you; and we two were together, alone and apart—you and I, murderer! you and I, murderer!"

I tried to escape the tyrannous fancy by thinking of other things and by making light of it. "The starved, bloodless brain," I said, "has strange thoughts." I fell to studying the dark, thick, blunt body in my hands; I noticed that the livid, rudely blotched, scaly surface showed in some lights a lovely play of prismatic colours. And growing poetical, I said, "When the wild west wind broke up the rainbow on the flying grey cloud and scattered it over the earth, a fragment doubtless fell on this reptile to give it that tender celestial tint. For thus it is Nature loves all her children, and gives to each some beauty, little or much; only to me, her hated stepchild, she gives no beauty, no grace. But stay, am I not wronging her? Did not Rima, beautiful above all things, love me well? said she not that I was beautiful?"

"Ah, yes, that was long ago," spoke the voice that mocked me by the pool when I combed out my tangled hair. "Long ago, when the soul that looked from your eyes was not the accursed thing it is now. *Now* Rima

would start at the sight of them; now she would fly in terror from their insane expression."

O spiteful voice, must you spoil even such appetite as I have for this fork-tongued spotty food? You by day and Rima by night — what shall I do — what shall I do?"

For it had now come to this, that the end of each day brought not sleep and dreams, but waking visions. Night by night, from my dry grass bed I beheld Nuflo sitting in his old doubled-up posture, his big brown feet close to the white ashes—sitting silent and miserable. I pitied him; I owed him hospitality; but it seemed intolerable that he should be there. It was better to shut my eyes; for then Rima's arms would be round my neck; the silky mist of her hair against my face, her flowery breath mixing with my breath. What a luminous face was hers! Even with close-shut eyes I could see it vividly, the translucent skin showing the radiant rose beneath, the lustrous eyes, spiritual and passionate, dark as purple wine under their dark lashes. Then my eyes would open wide. No Rima in my arms! But over there, a little way back from the fire, just beyond where old Nuflo had sat brooding a few minutes ago, Rima would be standing, still and pale and unspeakably sad. Why does she come to me from the outside darkness to stand there talking to me, yet never once lifting her mournful eyes to mine? "Do not believe it, Abel; no, that was only a phantom of your brain, the What-I-was that you remember so well. For do you not see that when I come she fades away and is nothing? Not that—do not ask it. I know

that I once refused to look into your eyes, and afterwards, in the cave at Riolama, I looked long and was happy—unspeakably happy! But now—oh, you do not know what you ask; you do not know the sorrow that has come into mine; that if you once beheld it for very sorrow you would die. And you must live. But I will wait patiently, and we shall be together in the end, and see each other without disguise. Nothing shall divide us. Only wish not for it soon; think not that death will ease your pain, and seek it not. Austerities? Good works? Prayers? They are not seen; they are not heard, they are less than nothing, and there is no intercession. I did not know it then, but you knew it. Your life was your own; you are not saved nor judged; acquit yourself—undo that which you have done, which Heaven cannot undo—and Heaven will say no word nor will I. You cannot, Abel, you cannot. That which you have done is done, and yours must be the penalty and the sorrow—yours and mine—yours and mine—yours and mine."

This, too, was a phantom, a Rima of the mind, one of the shapes the ever-changing black vapours of remorse and insanity would take; and all her mournful sentences were woven out of my own brain. I was not so crazed as not to know it; only a phantom, an illusion, yet more real than reality—real as my crime and vain remorse and death to come. It was, indeed, Rima returned to tell me that I that loved her had been more cruel to her than her cruellest enemies; for they had but tortured and destroyed her body with fire, while I had cast this

shadow on her soul—this sorrow transcending all sorrows, darker than death, immitigable, eternal.

If I could only have faded gradually, painlessly, growing feebler in body and dimmer in my senses each day, to sink at last into sleep! But it could not be. Still the fever in my brain, the mocking voice by day, the phantoms by night; and at last I became convinced that unless I quitted the forest before long, death would come to me in some terrible shape. But in the feeble condition I was now in, and without any provisions, to escape from the neighbourhood of Parahuari was impossible, seeing that it was necessary at starting to avoid the villages where the Indians were of the same tribe as Runi, who would recognise me as the white man who was once his guest and afterwards his implacable enemy. I must wait, and in spite of a weakened body and a mind diseased, struggle still to wrest a scanty subsistence from wild nature.

One day I discovered an old prostrate tree, buried under a thick growth of creeper and fern, the wood of which was nearly or quite rotten, as I proved by thrusting my knife to the haft in it. No doubt it would contain grubs—those huge, white wood-borers which now formed an important item in my diet. On the following day I returned to the spot with a chopper and a bundle of wedges to split the trunk up, but had scarcely commenced operations when an animal, startled at my blows, rushed or rather wriggled from its hiding-place under the dead wood at a distance of a few yards from me. It was a robust, round-headed, short-legged creature, about as big as a good-sized cat, and clothed in a thick, greenish-

brown fur. The ground all about was covered with creepers, binding the ferns, bushes, and old dead branches together; and in this confused tangle the animal scrambled and tore with a great show of energy, but really made very little progress; and all at once it flashed into my mind that it was a sloth—a common animal, but rarely seen on the ground—with no tree near to take refuge in. The shock of joy this discovery produced was great enough to unnerve me, and for some moments I stood trembling, hardly able to breathe; then recovering I hastened after it, and stunned it with a blow from my chopper on its round head.

"Poor sloth!" I said as I stood over it. "Poor old lazy-bones! Did Rima ever find you fast asleep in a tree, hugging a branch as if you loved it, and with her little hand pat your round, human-like head; and laugh mockingly at the astonishment in your drowsy, waking eyes; and scold you tenderly for wearing your nails so long, and for being so ugly? Lazy-bones, your death is revenged! O to be out of this wood—away from this sacred place—to be anywhere where killing is not murder!"

Then it came into my mind that I was now in possession of the supply of food which would enable me to quit the wood. A noble capture! As much to me as if a stray, migratory mule had rambled into the wood and found me, and I him. Now I would be my own mule, patient, and long-suffering, and far-going, with naked feet hardened to hoofs, and a pack of provender on my back to make me independent of the dry, bitter grass on the sunburnt savannahs.

Part of that night and the next morning was spent in curing the flesh over a smoky fire of green wood and in manufacturing a rough sack to store it in, for I had resolved to set out on my journey. How safely to convey Rima's treasured ashes was a subject of much thought and anxiety. The clay vessel on which I had expended so much loving, sorrowful labour had to be left, being too large and heavy to carry; eventually I put the fragments into a light sack; and in order to avert suspicion from the people I would meet on the way, above the ashes I packed a layer of roots and bulbs. These I would say contained medicinal properties, known to the white doctors, to whom I would sell them on my arrival at a Christian settlement, and with the money buy myself clothes to start life afresh.

On the morrow I would bid a last farewell to that forest of many memories. And my journey would be eastwards, over a wild savage land of mountains, rivers, and forests, where every dozen miles would be like a hundred of Europe; but a land inhabited by tribes not unfriendly to the stranger. And perhaps it would be my good fortune to meet with Indians travelling east, who would know the easiest routes; and from time to time some compassionate voyager would let me share his wood-skin, and many leagues would be got over without weariness, until some great river, flowing through British or Dutch Guiana, would be reached; and so on, and on, by slow or swift stages, with little to eat perhaps, with much labour and pain, in hot sun and in storm, to the Atlantic at last, and towns inhabited by Christian men.

In the evening of that day, after completing my preparations, I supped on the remaining portions of the sloth, not suitable for preservation, roasting bits of fat on the coals and boiling the head and bones into a broth; and after swallowing the liquid I crunched the bones and sucked the marrow, feeding like some hungry carnivorous animal.

Glancing at the fragments scattered on the floor, I remembered old Nuflo, and how I had surprised him at his feast of rank coatimundi in his secret retreat. "Nuflo, old neighbour," said I, "how quiet you are under your green coverlet, spangled just now with yellow flowers! It is no sham sleep, old man, I know. If any suspicion of these curious doings, this feast of flesh on a spot once sacred, could flit like a small moth into your mouldy hollow skull, you would soon thrust out your old nose to sniff the savour of roasting fat once more."

There was in me at that moment an inclination to laughter: it came to nothing, but affected me strangely, like an impulse I had not experienced since boyhood—familiar, yet novel. After the good-night to my neighbour, I tumbled into my straw and slept soundly, animal-like. No fancies and phantoms that night: the lidless, white, implacable eyes of the serpent's severed head were turned to dust at last: no sudden dream-glare lighted up old Cla-cla's wrinkled dead face and white, blood-dabbled locks: old Nuflo stayed beneath his green coverlet; nor did my mournful spirit-bride come to me to make my heart faint at the thought of immortality.

But when morning dawned again it was bitter to rise

up and go away for ever from that spot where I had often talked with Rima—the true and the visionary. The sky was cloudless and the forest wet as if rain had fallen; it was only a heavy dew, and it made the foliage look pale and hoary in the early light. And the light grew, and a whispering wind sprung as I walked through the wood; and the fast-evaporating moisture was like a bloom on the feathery fronds and grass and rank herbage; but on the higher foliage it was like a faint iridescent mist—a glory above the trees. The everlasting beauty and freshness of nature was over all again, as I had so often seen it with joy and adoration before grief and dreadful passions had dimmed my vision. And now as I walked, murmuring my last farewell, my eyes grew dim again with the tears that gathered to them.

CHAPTER XXII

BEFORE that well-nigh hopeless journey to the coast was half over I became ill—so ill that anyone who had looked on me might well have imagined that I had come to the end of my pilgrimage. That was what I feared. For days I remained sunk in the deepest despondence; then, in a happy moment, I remembered how, after being bitten by the serpent, when death had seemed near and inevitable, I had madly rushed away through the forest in search of help, and wandered lost for hours in the storm and darkness, and in the end escaped death, probably by means of these frantic exertions. The recollection served to inspire me with a new desperate courage. Bidding good-bye to the Indian village where the fever had smitten me, I set out once more on that apparently hopeless adventure. Hopeless, indeed, it seemed to one in my weak condition. My legs trembled under me when I walked, while hot sun and pelting rain were like flame and stinging ice to my morbidly sensitive skin.

For many days my sufferings were excessive, so that I often wished myself back in that milder purgatory of the forest, from which I had been so anxious to escape. When I try to retrace my route on the map there occurs a break here—a space on the chart where names of rivers

and mountains call up no image to my mind, although, in a few cases, they were names I seem to have heard in a troubled dream. The impressions of nature received during that sick period are blurred, or else so coloured and exaggerated by perpetual torturing anxiety, mixed with half-delirious night-fancies, that I can only think of that country as an earthly inferno, where I fought against every imaginable obstacle, alternately sweating and freezing, toiling as no man ever toiled before. Hot and cold, cold and hot, and no medium. Crystal waters; green shadows under coverture of broad, moist leaves; and night with dewy fanning winds—these chilled but did not refresh me; a region in which there was no sweet and pleasant thing; where even the Ita palm and mountain glory and airy epiphyte starring the woodland twilight with pendent blossoms had lost all grace and beauty; where all brilliant colours in earth and heaven were like the unmitigated sun that blinded my sight and burnt my brain. Doubtless I met with help from the natives, otherwise I do not see how I could have continued my journey: yet, in my dim mental picture of that period I see myself incessantly dogged by hostile savages. They flit like ghosts through the dark forest; they surround me and cut off all retreat, until I burst through them, escaping out of their very hands, to fly over some wide, naked savannah, hearing their shrill, pursuing yells behind me, and feeling the sting of their poisoned arrows in my flesh.

This I set down to the workings of remorse in a disordered mind and to clouds of venomous insects perpetually

shrilling in my ears and stabbing me with their small, fiery needles.

Not only was I pursued by phantom savages and pierced by phantom arrows, but the creations of the Indian imagination had now become as real to me as anything in nature. I was persecuted by that superhuman man-eating monster supposed to be the guardian of the forest. In dark, silent places he is lying in wait for me: hearing my slow, uncertain footsteps he starts up suddenly in my path, out-yelling the bearded aguaratos in the trees; and I stand paralysed, my blood curdled in my veins. His huge, hairy arms are round me; his foul, hot breath is on my skin; he will tear my liver out with his great green teeth to satisfy his raging hunger. Ah, no, he cannot harm me! For every ravening beast, every cold-blooded, venomous thing, and even the frightful Curupitá, half brute and half devil, that shared the forest with her, loved and worshipped Rima, and that mournful burden I carried, her ashes, was a talisman to save me. He has left me, the semi-human monster, uttering such wild, lamentable cries as he hurries away into the deeper, darker woods, that horror changes to grief, and I, too, lament Rima for the first time: a memory of all the mystic, unimaginable grace and loveliness and joy that had vanished smites on my heart with such sudden, intense pain that I cast myself prone on the earth and weep tears that are like drops of blood.

Where, in the rude savage heart of Guiana was this region where the natural obstacles and pain and hunger and thirst and everlasting weariness were terrible enough

without the imaginary monsters and legions of phantoms that peopled it, I cannot say. Nor can I conjecture how far I strayed north or south from my course. I only know that marshes that were like Sloughs of Despond, and barren and wet savannahs, were crossed; and forests that seemed infinite in extent and never to be got through; and scores of rivers that boiled round the sharp rocks, threatening to submerge or dash in pieces the frail bark canoe—black and frightful to look on as rivers in hell; and nameless mountain after mountain to be toiled round or toiled over. I may have seen Roraima during that mentally clouded period. I vaguely remember a far-extending gigantic wall of stone that seemed to bar all further progress—a rocky precipice rising to a stupendous height, seen by moonlight, with a huge sinuous rope of white mist suspended from its summit; as if the guardian camoodi of the mountain had been a league-long spectral serpent which was now dropping its coils from the mighty stone table to frighten away the rash intruder.

That spectral moonlight camoodi was one of many serpent fancies that troubled me. There was another, surpassing them all, which attended me many days. When the sun grew hot overhead and the way was over open savannah country I would see something moving on the ground at my side and always keeping abreast of me. A small snake, one or two feet long. No, not a small snake, but a sinuous mark in the pattern on a huge serpent's head, five or six yards long, always moving deliberately at my side. If a cloud came over the sun, or a fresh breeze sprang up, gradually the outline of that awful head would

fade and the well-defined pattern would resolve itself into the motlings on the earth. But if the sun grew more and more hot and dazzling as the day progressed, then the tremendous ophidian head would become increasingly real to my sight, with glistening scales and symmetrical markings; and I would walk carefully not to stumble against or touch it; and when I cast my eyes behind me I could see no end to its great coils extending across the savannah. Even looking back from the summit of a high hill I could see it stretching leagues and leagues away through forests and rivers, across wide plains, valleys and mountains, to lose itself at last in the infinite blue distance.

How or when this monster left me—washed away by cold rains perhaps—I do not know. Probably it only transformed itself into some new shape, its long coils perhaps changing into those endless processions and multitudes of pale-faced people I seem to remember having encountered. In my devious wanderings I must have reached the shores of the undiscovered great White Lake, and passed through the long shining streets of Manoa, the mysterious city in the wilderness. I see myself there, the wide thoroughfare filled from end to end with people, gaily dressed as if for some high festival, all drawing aside to let the wretched pilgrim pass, staring at his fever and famine-wasted figure, in its strange rags, with its strange burden.

A new Ahasuerus, cursed by inexpiable crime, yet sustained by a great purpose.

But Ahasuerus prayed ever for death to come to him and ran to meet it, while I fought against it with all my little strength. Only at intervals, when the shadows

seemed to lift and give me relief, would I pray to Death to spare me yet a little longer; but when the shadows darkened again and hope seemed almost quenched in utter gloom, then I would curse it and defy its power.

Through it all I clung to the belief that my will would conquer, that it would enable me to keep off the great enemy from my worn and suffering body until the wished goal was reached; then only would I cease to fight and let death have its way. There would have been comfort in this belief had it not been for that fevered imagination which corrupted everything that touched me and gave it some new hateful character. For soon enough this conviction that the will would triumph grew to something monstrous, a parent of monstrous fancies. Worst of all, when I felt no actual pain, but only unutterable weariness of body and soul, when feet and legs were numb so that I knew not whether I trod on dry hot rock or in slime, was the fancy that I was already dead, so far as the body was concerned—had perhaps been dead for days—that only the unconquerable will survived to compel the dead flesh to do its work.

Whether it really was will—more potent than the bark of barks and wiser than the physicians—or merely the *vis medicatrix* with which nature helps our weakness even when the will is suspended, that saved me I cannot say; but it is certain that I gradually recovered health, physical and mental, and finally reached the coast comparatively well, although my mind was still in a gloomy, desponding state when I first walked the streets of Georgetown, in rags, half-starved and penniless.

But even when well, long after the discovery that my flesh was not only alive, but that it was of an exceedingly tough quality, the idea born during the darkest period of my pilgrimage, that die I must, persisted in my mind. I had lived through that which would have killed most men—lived only to accomplish the one remaining purpose of my life. Now it was accomplished; the sacred ashes brought so far, with such infinite labour, through so many and such great perils, were safe and would mix with mine at last. There was nothing more in life to make me love it or keep me prisoner in its weary chains. This prospect of near death faded in time; love of life returned, and the earth had recovered its everlasting freshness and beauty: only that feeling about Rima's ashes did not fade or change, and is as strong now as it was then. Say that it is morbid—call it superstition if you like; but there it is, the most powerful motive I have known, always in all things to be taken into account—a philosophy of life to be made to fit it. Or take it as a symbol, since that may come to be one with the thing symbolised. In those darkest days in the forest I had her as a visitor—a Rima of the mind, whose words when she spoke reflected my despair. Yet even then I was not entirely without hope. Heaven itself, she said, could not undo that which I had done; and she also said that if I forgave myself Heaven would say no word, nor would she. That is my philosophy still: prayers, austerities, good works—they avail nothing, and there is no intercession, and outside of the soul there is no forgiveness in heaven or earth for sin. Nevertheless there is a way, which every soul can find out for itself—

even the most rebellious, the most darkened with crime and tormented by remorse. In that way I have walked; and, self-forgiven and self-absolved, I know that if she were to return once more and appear to me—even here where her ashes are—I know that her divine eyes would no longer refuse to look into mine, since the sorrow which seemed eternal and would have slain me to see would not now be in them.

EL OMBÚ

TO MY FRIEND

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

("*Singularisimo escritor ingles*")

Who has lived with and knows (even to the marrow, as they would themselves say) the horsemen of the Pampas, and who alone of European writers has rendered something of the vanishing colour of that remote life.

EL OMBÚ

This history of a house that had been was told in the shade, one summer's day, by Nicandro, that old man to whom we all loved to listen, since he could remember and properly narrate the life of every person he had known in his native place, near to the lake of Chascomus, on the southern pampas of Buenos Ayres.

CHAPTER I

IN all this district, though you should go twenty leagues to this way and that, you will not find a tree as big as this ombú, standing solitary, where there is no house; therefore it is known to all as "the ombú," as if but one existed; and the name of all this estate, which is now ownerless and ruined, is El Ombú. From one of the higher branches, if you can climb, you will see the lake of Chascomus, two thirds of a league away, from shore to shore, and the village on its banks. Even smaller things will you see on a clear day; perhaps a red line moving across the water—a flock of flamingos flying in their usual way. A great tree standing alone, with no house near it; only the old brick foundations of a house, so overgrown with grass and weeds that you have to look closely to find them. When I am out with my flock in the summer time, I often come here to sit in the shade. It is near the main road; travellers, droves of cattle, the diligence, and bullock-carts pass in sight. Sometimes, at noon, I find a traveller

resting in the shade, and if he is not sleeping we talk and he tells me the news of that great world my eyes have never seen. They say that sorrow and at last ruin comes upon the house on whose roof the shadow of the ombú tree falls; and on that house which now is not, the shadow of this tree came every summer day when the sun was low. They say, too, that those who sit much in the ombú shade become crazed. Perhaps, sir, the bone of my skull is thicker than in most men, since I have been accustomed to sit here all my life, and though now an old man I have not yet lost my reason. It is true that evil fortune came to the old house in the end; but into every door sorrow must enter—sorrow and death that comes to all men; and every house must fall at last.

Do you hear the mangangá, the carpenter bee, in the foliage over our heads? Look at him, like a ball of shining gold among the green leaves, suspended in one place, humming loudly! Ah, señor, the years that are gone, the people that have lived and died, speak to me thus audibly when I am sitting here by myself. These are memories; but there are other things that come back to us from the past; I mean ghosts. Sometimes, at midnight, the whole tree, from its great roots to its topmost leaves, is seen from a distance shining like white fire. What is that fire, seen of so many, which does not scorch the leaves? And, sometimes, when a traveller lies down here to sleep the siesta, he hears sounds of footsteps coming and going, and noises of dogs and fowls, and of children shouting and laughing, and voices of people talking; but when he starts up and listens, the sounds grow faint, and seem at last to

pass away into the tree with a low murmur as of wind among the leaves.

As a small boy, from the time when I was able, at the age of about six years, to climb on to a pony and ride, I knew this tree. It was then what it is now; five men with their arms stretched to their utmost length could hardly encircle it. And the house stood there, where you see a bed of nettles—a long, low house, built of bricks, when there were few brick houses in this district, with a thatched roof.

The last owner was just touching on old age. Not that he looked aged; on the contrary, he looked what he was, a man among men, a head taller than most, with the strength of an ox; but the wind had blown a little sprinkling of white ashes into his great beard and his hair, which grew to his shoulders like the mane of a black horse. That was Don Santos Ugarte, known to all men in this district as the White Horse, on account of the whiteness of his skin where most men look dark; also because of that proud temper and air of authority which he had. And for still another reason—the number of children in this neighbourhood of which he was said to be the father. In all houses, for many leagues around, the children were taught to reverence him, calling him "uncle," and when he appeared they would run and, dropping on their knees before him, cry out "*Bendicion mi tio.*" He would give them his blessing; then, after tweaking a nose and pinching an ear or two, he would flourish his whip over their heads to signify that he had done with them, and that they must quickly get out of his way.

These were children of the wind, as the saying is, and the desire of his heart was for a legitimate son, an Ugarte by name, who would come after him at El Ombú, as he had come after his father. But though he had married thrice, there was no son born, and no child. Some thought it a mystery that one with so many sons should yet be without a son. The mystery, friend, was only for those who fail to remember that such things are not determined by ourselves. We often say, that He who is above us is too great to concern Himself with our small affairs. There are so many of us; and how shall He, seated on his throne at so great a distance, know all that passes in his dominions! But Santos was no ordinary person, and He who was greater than Santos had doubtless had his attention drawn to this man; and had considered the matter, and had said, "You shall not have your desire; for though you are a devout man, one who gives freely of his goods to the church and my poor, I am not wholly satisfied with you." And so it came to pass that he had no son and heir.

His first two wives had died, so it was said, because of his bitterness against them. I only knew the third—Doña Mericie, a silent, sad woman, who was of less account than any servant, or any slave in the house. And I, a simple boy, what could I know of the secrets of her heart? Nothing! I only saw her pale and silent and miserable, and because her eyes followed me, I feared her, and tried always to keep out of her way. But one morning, when I came to El Ombú and went into the kitchen, I found her there alone, and before I could escape she caught me in

her arms, and lifting me off my feet strained me against her breast, crying, *hijo de mi alma*, and I knew not what beside ; and calling God's blessing on me, she covered my face with kisses. Then all at once, hearing Santos' voice without, she dropped me and remained like a woman of stone, staring at the door with scared eyes.

She, too, died in a little while, and her disappearance made no difference in the house, and if Santos wore a black band on his arm, it was because custom demanded it and not because he mourned for her in his heart.

CHAPTER II

THAT silent ghost of a woman being gone, no one could say of him that he was hard; nor could anything be said against him except that he was not a saint, in spite of his name. But, sir, we do not look for saints among strong men, who live in the saddle, and are at the head of big establishments. If there was one who was a father to the poor it was Santos; therefore he was loved by many, and only those who had done him an injury or had crossed him in any way had reason to fear and hate him. But let me now relate what I, a boy of ten, witnessed one day in the year 1808. This will show you what the man's temper was; and his courage, and the strength of his wrists.

It was his custom to pay a visit every two or three months to a monastery at a distance of half-a-day's journey from El Ombú.

He was greatly esteemed by the friars, and whenever he went to see them he had a led horse to carry his presents to the Brothers;—a side of fat beef, a sucking-pig or two, a couple of lambs, when they were in season, a few fat turkeys and ducks, a bunch of big partridges, a brace or two of armadillos, the breast and wings of a fat ostrich; and in summer, a dozen ostriches' eggs, and I know not what besides.

One evening I was at El Ombú, and was just starting for home, when Santos saw me, and cried out, "Get off and let your horse go, Nicandro. I am going to the monastery to-morrow, and you shall ride the laden horse, and save me the trouble of leading it. You will be like a little bird perched on his back and he will not feel your few ounces' weight. You can sleep on a sheepskin in the kitchen, and get up an hour before daybreak."

The stars were still shining when we set out on our journey the next morning, in the month of June, and when we crossed the river Sanboronbón at sunrise the earth was all white with hoar frost. At noon, we arrived at our destination, and were received by the friars, who embraced and kissed Santos on both cheeks, and took charge of our horses. After breakfast in the kitchen, the day being now warm and pleasant, we went and sat out of doors to sip maté and smoke, and for an hour or longer, the conversation between Santos and the Brothers had been going on when, all at once, a youth appeared coming at a fast gallop towards the gate, shouting as he came, "Los Ingleses! Los Ingleses!" We all jumped up and ran to the gate, and climbing up by the posts and bars, saw at a distance of less than half-a-league to the east, a great army of men marching in the direction of Buenos Ayres. We could see that the foremost part of the army had come to a halt on the banks of a stream which flows past the monastery and empties itself into the Plata, two leagues farther east. The army was all composed of infantry, but a great many persons on horseback could be seen following it, and these,

the young man said, were neighbours who had come out to look at the English invaders; and he also said that the soldiers, on arriving at the stream, had begun to throw away their blankets, and that the people were picking them up. Santos hearing this, said he would go and join the crowd, and mounting his horse and followed by me, and by two of the Brothers, who said they wished to get a few blankets for the monastery, we set out at a gallop for the stream.

Arrived at the spot, we found that the English, not satisfied with the ford, which had a very muddy bottom, had made a new crossing-place for themselves by cutting down the bank on both sides, and that numbers of blankets had been folded and laid in the bed of the stream where it was about twenty-five yards wide. Hundreds of blankets were also being thrown away, and the people were picking them up and loading their horses with them. Santos at once threw himself into the crowd and gathered about a dozen blankets, the best he could find, for the friars; then he gathered a few for himself and ordered me to fasten them on the back of my horse.

The soldiers, seeing us scrambling for the blankets, were much amused; but when one man among us cried out, "These people must be mad to throw their blankets away in cold weather—perhaps their red jackets will keep them warm when they lie down to-night"—there was one soldier who understood, and could speak Spanish, and he replied, "No, sirs, we have no further need of blankets. When we next sleep it will be in the best beds in the capitol." Then Santos shouted back, "That,

sirs, will perhaps be a sleep from which some of you will never awake." That speech attracted their attention to Santos, and the soldier who had spoken before returned, "There are not many men like you in these parts, therefore what you say does not alarm us." Then they looked at the friars fastening the blankets Santos had given them on to their horses, and seeing that they wore heavy iron spurs strapped on their bare feet, they shouted with laughter, and the one who talked with us cried out, "We are sorry, good Brothers, that we have not boots as well as blankets to give you."

But our business was now done, and bidding good-bye to the friars, we set out on our return journey, Santos saying that we should be at home before midnight.

It was past the middle of the afternoon, we having ridden about six leagues, when we spied at a distance ahead a great number of mounted men scattered about over the plain, some standing still, others galloping this way or that.

"El pato! el pato!" cried Santos with excitement, "Come, boy, let us go and watch the battle while it is near, and when it is passed on we will go our way. Urging his horse to a gallop, I following, we came to where the men were struggling for the ball, and stood for a while looking on. But it was not in him to remain a mere spectator for long; never did he see a cattlemarking, or parting, or races, or a dance, or any game, and above all games el Pato, but he must have a part in it. Very soon he dismounted to throw off some of the heaviest parts of his horse-gear, and ordering me to take them up on my horse and follow him, he rode in among the players.

About forty or fifty men had gathered at that spot, and were sitting quietly on their horses in a wide circle, waiting to see the result of a struggle for the Pato between three men who had hold of the ball. They were strong men, well mounted, each resolved to carry off the prize from the others. Sir, when I think of that sight, and remember that the game is no longer played because of the Tyrant who forbade it, I am ready to cry out that there are no longer men on these plains where I first saw the light! How they tugged and strained and sweated, almost dragging each other out of the saddle, their trained horses leaning away, digging their hoofs into the turf, as when they resist the shock of a lassoed animal, when the lasso stiffens and the pull comes! One of the men was a big, powerful mulatto, and the bystanders, thinking the victory would be his, were only waiting to see him wrest the ball from the others to rush upon and try to deprive him of it before he could escape from the crowd.

Santos refused to stand inactive, for was there not a fourth handle to the ball to be grasped by another fighter? Spurring his horse into the group, he very soon succeeded in getting hold of the disengaged handle. A cry of resentment at this action on the part of a stranger went up from some of those who were looking on, mixed with applause at the daring from others, while the three men who had been fighting against each other, each one for himself, now perceived that they had a common enemy. Excited as they were by the struggle, they could not but be startled at the stranger's appearance—that huge man on a big horse, so white-skinned and long-haired, with a

black beard, that came down over his breast, and who showed them, when he threw back his poncho, the knife that was like a sword and the big brass-barrelled pistol worn at his waist. Very soon after he joined in the fray all four men came to the earth. But they did not fall together, and the last to go down was Santos, who would not be dragged off his horse, and in the end horse and man came down on the top of the others. In coming down, two of the men had lost their hold of the ball; last of all, the big mulatto, to save himself from being crushed under the falling horse, was forced to let go, and in his rage at being beaten, he whipped out his long knife against the stranger. Santos, too quick for him, dealt him a blow on the forehead with the heavy silver handle of his whip, dropping him stunned to the ground. Of the four, Santos alone had so far escaped injury, and rising and remounting, the ball still in his hand, he rode out from among them, the crowd opening on each side to make room for him.

Now in the crowd there was one tall, imposing-looking man, wearing a white poncho, many silver ornaments, and a long knife in an embossed silver sheath; his horse, too, which was white as milk, was covered with silver trappings. This man alone raised his voice; "Friends and comrades," he cried, "is this to be the finish? If this stranger is permitted to carry the Pato away, it will not be because of his stronger wrist and better horse, but because he carries firearms. Comrades, what do you say?"

But there was no answer. They had seen the power

and resolution of the man, and though they were many they preferred to let him go in peace. Then the man on a white horse, with a scowl of anger and contempt, turned from them and began following us at a distance of about fifty yards. Whenever Santos turned back to come to close quarters with him, he retired, only to turn and follow us again as soon as Santos resumed his course. In this way we rode till sunset. Santos was grave, but calm; I, being so young, was in constant terror. "Oh, uncle," I whispered, "for the love of God fire your pistol at this man and kill him, so that he may not kill us!"

Santos laughed. "Fool of a boy," he replied, "do you know that he wants me to fire at him! He knows that I could not hit him at this distance, and that after discharging my pistol we should be equal, man to man, and knife to knife; and who knows then which would kill the other? God knows best, since He knows everything, and He has put it into my heart not to fire."

When it grew dark we rode slower, and the man then lessened the distance between us. We could hear the chink-chink of his silver trappings, and when I looked back I could see a white misty form following us like a ghost. Then, all at once, there came a noise of hoofs and a whistling sound of something thrown, and Santos' horse plunged and reared and kicked, then stood still trembling with terror. His hind legs were entangled in the bolas which had been thrown. With a curse Santos threw himself off, and, drawing his knife, cut the thong which bound the animal's legs, and remounting we went on as before, the white figure still following us.

At length, about midnight, the Sanborombón was reached, at the ford where we had crossed in the morning, where it was about forty yards wide, and the water only high as the surcingle in the deepest parts.

"Let your heart be glad, Nicandro!" said Santos, as we went down into the water; "for our time is come now, and be careful to do as I bid you."

We crossed slowly, and coming out on the south side, Santos quietly dropped off his horse, and, speaking in a low voice, ordered me to ride slowly on with the two horses and wait for him in the road. He said that the man who followed would not see him crouching under the bank, and thinking it safe would cross over, only to receive the charge fired at a few yards distance.

That was an anxious interval that followed, I waiting alone, scarcely daring to breathe, staring into the darkness in fear of that white figure that was like a ghost, listening for the pistol shot. My prayer to heaven was to direct the bullet in its course, so that it might go to that terrible man's heart, and we be delivered from him. But there was no shot, and no sound except a faint chink of silver and sound of hoof-beats that came to my ears after a time, and soon ceased to be heard. The man, perhaps, had some suspicion of the other's plan and had given up the chase and gone away.

Nothing more do I remember of that journey which ended at El Ombú at cock-crow, except that at one spot Santos fastened a thong round my waist and bound me before and behind to the saddle to prevent my falling from my horse every time I went to sleep.

CHAPTER III

REMEMBER, Señor, that I have spoken of things that passed when I was small. The memories of that time are few and scattered, like the fragments of tiles and bricks and rusty iron which one may find half-buried among the weeds, where the house once stood. Fragments that once formed part of the building. Certain events, some faces, and some voices, I remember, but I cannot say the year. Nor can I say how many years had gone by after Doña Mericie's death, and after my journey to the monastery. Perhaps they were few, perhaps many. Invasions had come, wars with a foreigner and with the savages, and Independence, and many things had happened at a distance. He, Santos Ugarte, was older, I know, greyer, when that great misfortune and calamity came to one whom God had created so strong, so brave, so noble. And all on account of a slave, a youth born at El Ombú, who had been preferred above the others by his master. For, as it is said, we breed crows to pick our eyes out. But I will say nothing against that poor youth, who was the cause of the disaster, for it was not wholly his fault. Part of the fault was in Santos—his indomitable temper and his violence. And perhaps, too, the time was come when He who rules over all men had said, 'You have raised your voice and have ridden over others

long enough. Look, Santos! I shall set My foot upon you, and you shall be like a wild pumpkin at the end of summer, when it is dryer and more brittle that an empty egg-shell."

Remember that there were slaves in those days, also that there was a law fixing every man's price, old or young, so that if any slave went, money in hand, to his master and offered him the price of his liberty, from that moment he became a free man. It mattered not that his master wished not to sell him. So just was the law.

Of his slaves Santos was accustomed to say, "These are my children, and serve because they love me, not because they are slaves; and if I were to offer his freedom to any one among them, he would refuse to take it." He saw their faces, not their hearts.

His favourite was Meliton, black but well favoured, and though but a youth, he had authority over the others, and dressed well, and rode his master's best horses, and had horses of his own. But it was never said of him that he gained that eminence by means of flattery and a tongue cunning to frame lies. On the contrary, he was loved by all, even by those he was set above, because of his goodness of heart and a sweet and gay disposition. He was one of those who can do almost anything better than others; whatever his master wanted done, whether it was to ride a race, or break a horse, or throw a lasso, or make a bridle, or whip, or surcingle, or play on a guitar, or sing, or dance, it was Meliton, Meliton. There was no one like him.

Now this youth cherished a secret ambition in his heart, and saved, and saved his money; and at length one day he came with a handful of silver and gold to Santos, and said, "Master, here is the price of my freedom, take it and count it, and see that it is right, and let me remain at El Ombú to serve you henceforth without payment. But I shall no longer be a slave."

Santos took the money into his hand, and spoke, "It was for this then that you saved, even the money I gave you to spend and to run with, and the money you made by selling the animals I gave you—you saved it for this! Ingrate, with a heart blacker than your skin! Take back the money, and go from my presence, and never cross my path again if you wish for a long life." And with that he hurled the handful of silver and gold into the young man's face with such force that he was cut and bruised with the coins and well nigh stunned. He went back staggering to his horse, and mounting, rode away, sobbing like a child, the blood running from his face.

He soon left this neighbourhood and went to live at Las Vivoras, on the Vecino river, south of Dolores, and there made good use of his freedom, buying fat animals for the market; and for a space of two years he prospered, and every man, rich or poor, was his friend. Nevertheless he was not happy, for his heart was loyal and he loved his old master, who had been a father to him, and desired above all things to be forgiven. And, at length, hoping that Santos had outlived his resentment and would be pleased to see him again, he one day came to El Ombú and asked to see the master.

The old man came out of the house and greeted him jovially. "Ha, Meliton," he cried with a laugh, "you have returned in spite of my warning. Come down from your horse and let me take your hand once more."

The other, glad to think he was forgiven, alighted, and advancing, put out his hand. Santos took it in his, only to crush it with so powerful a grip, that the young man cried out aloud, and blinded with tears of pain, he did not see that his master had the big brass pistol in his left hand, and did not know that his last moment had come. He fell with a bullet in his heart.

Look, señor, where I am pointing, twenty yards or so from the edge of the shadow of the ombú, do you see a dark green weed with a yellow flower on a tall stem growing on the short, dry grass? It was just there, on the very spot where the yellow flower is, that poor Meliton fell, and was left lying, covered with blood, until noon the next day. For no person dared take up the corpse until the Alcalde had been informed of the matter and had come to inquire into it.

Santos had mounted his horse and gone away without a word, taking the road to Buenos Ayres. He had done that for which he would have to pay dearly; for a life is a life, whether the skin be black or white, and no man can slay another deliberately, in cold blood, and escape the penalty. The law is no respecter of persons, and when he, who commits such a deed, is a man of substance, he must expect that Advocates and Judges, with all those who take up his cause, will bleed him well before they procure him a pardon.

Ugarte cared nothing for that, he had been as good as his word, and the devil in his heart was satisfied. Only he would not wait at his estancia to be taken, nor would he go and give himself up to the authorities, who would then have to place him in confinement, and it would be many months before his liberation. That would be like suffocation to him; to such a man a prison is like a tomb. No, he would go to Buenos Ayres and embark for Montevideo, and from that place he would put the matter in motion, and wait there until it was all settled and he was free to return to El Ombú.

Dead Meliton was taken away and buried in consecrated ground at Chascomus. Rain fell, and washed away the red stains on the ground. In the spring, the swallows returned and built their nests under the eaves; but Ugarte came not back, nor did any certain tidings of him reach us. It was said, I know not whether truly or not, that the Advocate who defended him, and the Judge of First Instance, who had the case before him, had quarrelled about the division of the reward, and both being rich, proud persons, they had allowed themselves to forget the old man waiting there month after month for his pardon, which never came to him.

Better for him if he never heard of the ruin which had fallen on El Ombú during his long exile. There was no one in authority: the slaves, left to themselves, went away, and there was no person to restrain them. As for the cattle and horses, they were blown away like thistledown, and everyone was free to pasture his herds and flocks on the land.

The house for a time was in charge of some person placed there by the authorities, but little by little it was emptied of its contents; and at last it was abandoned, and for a long time no one could be found to live in it on account of the ghosts.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was living at that time, a few leagues from El Ombú, one Valerio de la Cueva, a poor man, whose all consisted of a small flock of three or four hundred sheep and a few horses. He had been allowed to make a small rancho, a mere hut, to shelter himself and his wife Donata and their one child, a boy named Bruno; and to pay for the grass his few sheep consumed he assisted in the work at the estancia house. This poor man, hearing of El Ombú, where he could have house and ground for nothing, offered himself as occupant, and in time came with wife and child and his small flock, and all the furniture he possessed—a bed, two or three chairs, a pot and kettle, and perhaps a few other things. Such poverty El Ombú had not known, but all others had feared to inhabit such a place on account of its evil name, so that it was left for Valerio, who was a stranger in the district.

Tell me, señor, have you ever in your life met with a man, who was perhaps poor, or even clothed in rags, and who yet when you had looked at and conversed with him, has caused you to say: Here is one who is like no other man in the world? Perhaps on rising and going out, on some clear morning in summer, he looked at the sun when it rose, and perceived an angel sitting in it, and as he gazed, something from that being fell upon and passed into and

up and go away for ever from that spot where I had often talked with Rima—the true and the visionary. The sky was cloudless and the forest wet as if rain had fallen; it was only a heavy dew, and it made the foliage look pale and hoary in the early light. And the light grew, and a whispering wind sprung as I walked through the wood; and the fast-evaporating moisture was like a bloom on the feathery fronds and grass and rank herbage; but on the higher foliage it was like a faint iridescent mist—a glory above the trees. The everlasting beauty and freshness of nature was over all again, as I had so often seen it with joy and adoration before grief and dreadful passions had dimmed my vision. And now as I walked, murmuring my last farewell, my eyes grew dim again with the tears that gathered to them.

CHAPTER XXII

BEFORE that well-nigh hopeless journey to the coast was half over I became ill—so ill that anyone who had looked on me might well have imagined that I had come to the end of my pilgrimage. That was what I feared. For days I remained sunk in the deepest despondence; then, in a happy moment, I remembered how, after being bitten by the serpent, when death had seemed near and inevitable, I had madly rushed away through the forest in search of help, and wandered lost for hours in the storm and darkness, and in the end escaped death, probably by means of these frantic exertions. The recollection served to inspire me with a new desperate courage. Bidding good-bye to the Indian village where the fever had smitten me, I set out once more on that apparently hopeless adventure. Hopeless, indeed, it seemed to one in my weak condition. My legs trembled under me when I walked, while hot sun and pelting rain were like flame and stinging ice to my morbidly sensitive skin.

For many days my sufferings were excessive, so that I often wished myself back in that milder purgatory of the forest, from which I had been so anxious to escape. When I try to retrace my route on the map there occurs a break here—a space on the chart where names of rivers

and mountains call up no image to my mind, although, in a few cases, they were names I seem to have heard in a troubled dream. The impressions of nature received during that sick period are blurred, or else so coloured and exaggerated by perpetual torturing anxiety, mixed with half-delirious night-fancies, that I can only think of that country as an earthly inferno, where I fought against every imaginable obstacle, alternately sweating and freezing, toiling as no man ever toiled before. Hot and cold, cold and hot, and no medium. Crystal waters; green shadows under coverture of broad, moist leaves; and night with dewy fanning winds—these chilled but did not refresh me; a region in which there was no sweet and pleasant thing; where even the Ita palm and mountain glory and airy epiphyte starring the woodland twilight with pendent blossoms had lost all grace and beauty; where all brilliant colours in earth and heaven were like the unmitigated sun that blinded my sight and burnt my brain. Doubtless I met with help from the natives, otherwise I do not see how I could have continued my journey: yet, in my dim mental picture of that period I see myself incessantly dogged by hostile savages. They flit like ghosts through the dark forest; they surround me and cut off all retreat, until I burst through them, escaping out of their very hands, to fly over some wide, naked savannah, hearing their shrill, pursuing yells behind me, and feeling the sting of their poisoned arrows in my flesh.

This I set down to the workings of remorse in a disordered mind and to clouds of venomous insects perpetually

shrilling in my ears and stabbing me with their small, fiery needles.

Not only was I pursued by phantom savages and pierced by phantom arrows, but the creations of the Indian imagination had now become as real to me as anything in nature. I was persecuted by that superhuman man-eating monster supposed to be the guardian of the forest. In dark, silent places he is lying in wait for me: hearing my slow, uncertain footsteps he starts up suddenly in my path, out-yelling the bearded aguaratos in the trees; and I stand paralysed, my blood curdled in my veins. His huge, hairy arms are round me; his foul, hot breath is on my skin; he will tear my liver out with his great green teeth to satisfy his raging hunger. Ah, no, he cannot harm me! For every ravening beast, every cold-blooded, venomous thing, and even the frightful Curupitá, half brute and half devil, that shared the forest with her, loved and worshipped Rima, and that mournful burden I carried, her ashes, was a talisman to save me. He has left me, the semi-human monster, uttering such wild, lamentable cries as he hurries away into the deeper, darker woods, that horror changes to grief, and I, too, lament Rima for the first time: a memory of all the mystic, unimaginable grace and loveliness and joy that had vanished smites on my heart with such sudden, intense pain that I cast myself prone on the earth and weep tears that are like drops of blood.

Where, in the rude savage heart of Guiana was this region where the natural obstacles and pain and hunger and thirst and everlasting weariness were terrible enough

without the imaginary monsters and legions of phantoms that peopled it, I cannot say. Nor can I conjecture how far I strayed north or south from my course. I only know that marshes that were like Sloughs of Despond, and barren and wet savannahs, were crossed; and forests that seemed infinite in extent and never to be got through; and scores of rivers that boiled round the sharp rocks, threatening to submerge or dash in pieces the frail bark canoe—black and frightful to look on as rivers in hell; and nameless mountain after mountain to be toiled round or toiled over. I may have seen Roraima during that mentally clouded period. I vaguely remember a far-extending gigantic wall of stone that seemed to bar all further progress—a rocky precipice rising to a stupendous height, seen by moonlight, with a huge sinuous rope of white mist suspended from its summit; as if the guardian camoodi of the mountain had been a league-long spectral serpent which was now dropping its coils from the mighty stone table to frighten away the rash intruder.

That spectral moonlight camoodi was one of many serpent fancies that troubled me. There was another, surpassing them all, which attended me many days. When the sun grew hot overhead and the way was over open savannah country I would see something moving on the ground at my side and always keeping abreast of me. A small snake, one or two feet long. No, not a small snake, but a sinuous mark in the pattern on a huge serpent's head, five or six yards long, always moving deliberately at my side. If a cloud came over the sun, or a fresh breeze sprang up, gradually the outline of that awful head would

fade and the well-defined pattern would resolve itself into the motlings on the earth. But if the sun grew more and more hot and dazzling as the day progressed, then the tremendous ophidian head would become increasingly real to my sight, with glistening scales and symmetrical markings; and I would walk carefully not to stumble against or touch it; and when I cast my eyes behind me I could see no end to its great coils extending across the savannah. Even looking back from the summit of a high hill I could see it stretching leagues and leagues away through forests and rivers, across wide plains, valleys and mountains, to lose itself at last in the infinite blue distance.

How or when this monster left me—washed away by cold rains perhaps—I do not know. Probably it only transformed itself into some new shape, its long coils perhaps changing into those endless processions and multitudes of pale-faced people I seem to remember having encountered. In my devious wanderings I must have reached the shores of the undiscovered great White Lake, and passed through the long shining streets of Manoa, the mysterious city in the wilderness. I see myself there, the wide thoroughfare filled from end to end with people, gaily dressed as if for some high festival, all drawing aside to let the wretched pilgrim pass, staring at his fever and famine-wasted figure, in its strange rags, with its strange burden.

A new Ahasuerus, cursed by inexpiable crime, yet sustained by a great purpose.

But Ahasuerus prayed ever for death to come to him and ran to meet it, while I fought against it with all my little strength. Only at intervals, when the shadows

seemed to lift and give me relief, would I pray to Death to spare me yet a little longer; but when the shadows darkened again and hope seemed almost quenched in utter gloom, then I would curse it and defy its power.

Through it all I clung to the belief that my will would conquer, that it would enable me to keep off the great enemy from my worn and suffering body until the wished goal was reached; then only would I cease to fight and let death have its way. There would have been comfort in this belief had it not been for that fevered imagination which corrupted everything that touched me and gave it some new hateful character. For soon enough this conviction that the will would triumph grew to something monstrous, a parent of monstrous fancies. Worst of all, when I felt no actual pain, but only unutterable weariness of body and soul, when feet and legs were numb so that I knew not whether I trod on dry hot rock or in slime, was the fancy that I was already dead, so far as the body was concerned—had perhaps been dead for days—that only the unconquerable will survived to compel the dead flesh to do its work.

Whether it really was will—more potent than the bark of barks and wiser than the physicians—or merely the *vis medicatrix* with which nature helps our weakness even when the will is suspended, that saved me I cannot say; but it is certain that I gradually recovered health, physical and mental, and finally reached the coast comparatively well, although my mind was still in a gloomy, desponding state when I first walked the streets of Georgetown, in rags, half-starved and penniless.

But even when well, long after the discovery that my flesh was not only alive, but that it was of an exceedingly tough quality, the idea born during the darkest period of my pilgrimage, that die I must, persisted in my mind. I had lived through that which would have killed most men—lived only to accomplish the one remaining purpose of my life. Now it was accomplished; the sacred ashes brought so far, with such infinite labour, through so many and such great perils, were safe and would mix with mine at last. There was nothing more in life to make me love it or keep me prisoner in its weary chains. This prospect of near death faded in time; love of life returned, and the earth had recovered its everlasting freshness and beauty: only that feeling about Rima's ashes did not fade or change, and is as strong now as it was then. Say that it is morbid—call it superstition if you like; but there it is, the most powerful motive I have known, always in all things to be taken into account—a philosophy of life to be made to fit it. Or take it as a symbol, since that may come to be one with the thing symbolised. In those darkest days in the forest I had her as a visitor—a Rima of the mind, whose words when she spoke reflected my despair. Yet even then I was not entirely without hope. Heaven itself, she said, could not undo that which I had done; and she also said that if I forgave myself Heaven would say no word, nor would she. That is my philosophy still: prayers, austerities, good works—they avail nothing, and there is no intercession, and outside of the soul there is no forgiveness in heaven or earth for sin. Nevertheless there is a way, which every soul can find out for itself—

even the most rebellious, the most darkened with crime and tormented by remorse. In that way I have walked; and, self-forgiven and self-absolved, I know that if she were to return once more and appear to me—even here where her ashes are—I know that her divine eyes would no longer refuse to look into mine, since the sorrow which seemed eternal and would have slain me to see would not now be in them.

EL OMBÚ

TO MY FRIEND

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

(" *Singularisimo escritor ingles* ")

Who has lived with and knows (even to the marrow, as they would themselves say) the horsemen of the Pampas, and who alone of European writers has rendered something of the vanishing colour of that remote life.

EL OMBÚ

This history of a house that had been was told in the shade, one summer's day, by Nicandro, that old man to whom we all loved to listen, since he could remember and properly narrate the life of every person he had known in his native place, near to the lake of Chascomus, on the southern pampas of Buenos Ayres.

CHAPTER I

IN all this district, though you should go twenty leagues to this way and that, you will not find a tree as big as this ombú, standing solitary, where there is no house; therefore it is known to all as "the ombú," as if but one existed; and the name of all this estate, which is now ownerless and ruined, is El Ombú. From one of the higher branches, if you can climb, you will see the lake of Chascomus, two thirds of a league away, from shore to shore, and the village on its banks. Even smaller things will you see on a clear day; perhaps a red line moving across the water—a flock of flamingos flying in their usual way. A great tree standing alone, with no house near it; only the old brick foundations of a house, so overgrown with grass and weeds that you have to look closely to find them. When I am out with my flock in the summer time, I often come here to sit in the shade. It is near the main road; travellers, droves of cattle, the diligence, and bullock-carts pass in sight. Sometimes, at noon, I find a traveller

resting in the shade, and if he is not sleeping we talk and he tells me the news of that great world my eyes have never seen. They say that sorrow and at last ruin comes upon the house on whose roof the shadow of the ombú tree falls; and on that house which now is not, the shadow of this tree came every summer day when the sun was low. They say, too, that those who sit much in the ombú shade become crazed. Perhaps, sir, the bone of my skull is thicker than in most men, since I have been accustomed to sit here all my life, and though now an old man I have not yet lost my reason. It is true that evil fortune came to the old house in the end; but into every door sorrow must enter—sorrow and death that comes to all men; and every house must fall at last.

Do you hear the mangangá, the carpenter bee, in the foliage over our heads? Look at him, like a ball of shining gold among the green leaves, suspended in one place, humming loudly! Ah, señor, the years that are gone, the people that have lived and died, speak to me thus audibly when I am sitting here by myself. These are memories; but there are other things that come back to us from the past; I mean ghosts. Sometimes, at midnight, the whole tree, from its great roots to its topmost leaves, is seen from a distance shining like white fire. What is that fire, seen of so many, which does not scorch the leaves? And, sometimes, when a traveller lies down here to sleep the siesta, he hears sounds of footsteps coming and going, and noises of dogs and fowls, and of children shouting and laughing, and voices of people talking; but when he starts up and listens, the sounds grow faint, and seem at last to

pass away into the tree with a low murmur as of wind among the leaves.

As a small boy, from the time when I was able, at the age of about six years, to climb on to a pony and ride, I knew this tree. It was then what it is now; five men with their arms stretched to their utmost length could hardly encircle it. And the house stood there, where you see a bed of nettles—a long, low house, built of bricks, when there were few brick houses in this district, with a thatched roof.

The last owner was just touching on old age. Not that he looked aged; on the contrary, he looked what he was, a man among men, a head taller than most, with the strength of an ox; but the wind had blown a little sprinkling of white ashes into his great beard and his hair, which grew to his shoulders like the mane of a black horse. That was Don Santos Ugarte, known to all men in this district as the White Horse, on account of the whiteness of his skin where most men look dark; also because of that proud temper and air of authority which he had. And for still another reason—the number of children in this neighbourhood of which he was said to be the father. In all houses, for many leagues around, the children were taught to reverence him, calling him "uncle," and when he appeared they would run and, dropping on their knees before him, cry out "*Bendicion mi tio.*" He would give them his blessing; then, after tweaking a nose and pinching an ear or two, he would flourish his whip over their heads to signify that he had done with them, and that they must quickly get out of his way.

These were children of the wind, as the saying is, and the desire of his heart was for a legitimate son, an Ugarte by name, who would come after him at El Ombú, as he had come after his father. But though he had married thrice, there was no son born, and no child. Some thought it a mystery that one with so many sons should yet be without a son. The mystery, friend, was only for those who fail to remember that such things are not determined by ourselves. We often say, that He who is above us is too great to concern Himself with our small affairs. There are so many of us; and how shall He, seated on his throne at so great a distance, know all that passes in his dominions! But Santos was no ordinary person, and He who was greater than Santos had doubtless had his attention drawn to this man; and had considered the matter, and had said, "You shall not have your desire; for though you are a devout man, one who gives freely of his goods to the church and my poor, I am not wholly satisfied with you." And so it came to pass that he had no son and heir.

His first two wives had died, so it was said, because of his bitterness against them. I only knew the third—Doña Mericie, a silent, sad woman, who was of less account than any servant, or any slave in the house. And I, a simple boy, what could I know of the secrets of her heart? Nothing! I only saw her pale and silent and miserable, and because her eyes followed me, I feared her, and tried always to keep out of her way. But one morning, when I came to El Ombú and went into the kitchen, I found her there alone, and before I could escape she caught me in

her arms, and lifting me off my feet strained me against her breast, crying, *hijo de mi alma*, and I knew not what beside; and calling God's blessing on me, she covered my face with kisses. Then all at once, hearing Santos' voice without, she dropped me and remained like a woman of stone, staring at the door with scared eyes.

She, too, died in a little while, and her disappearance made no difference in the house, and if Santos wore a black band on his arm, it was because custom demanded it and not because he mourned for her in his heart.

CHAPTER II

THAT silent ghost of a woman being gone, no one could say of him that he was hard; nor could anything be said against him except that he was not a saint, in spite of his name. But, sir, we do not look for saints among strong men, who live in the saddle, and are at the head of big establishments. If there was one who was a father to the poor it was Santos; therefore he was loved by many, and only those who had done him an injury or had crossed him in any way had reason to fear and hate him. But let me now relate what I, a boy of ten, witnessed one day in the year 1808. This will show you what the man's temper was; and his courage, and the strength of his wrists.

It was his custom to pay a visit every two or three months to a monastery at a distance of half-a-day's journey from El Ombú.

He was greatly esteemed by the friars, and whenever he went to see them he had a led horse to carry his presents to the Brothers;—a side of fat beef, a sucking-pig or two, a couple of lambs, when they were in season, a few fat turkeys and ducks, a bunch of big partridges, a brace or two of armadillos, the breast and wings of a fat ostrich; and in summer, a dozen ostriches' eggs, and I know not what besides.

One evening I was at El Ombú, and was just starting for home, when Santos saw me, and cried out, "Get off and let your horse go, Nicandro. I am going to the monastery to-morrow, and you shall ride the laden horse, and save me the trouble of leading it. You will be like a little bird perched on his back and he will not feel your few ounces' weight. You can sleep on a sheepskin in the kitchen, and get up an hour before daybreak."

The stars were still shining when we set out on our journey the next morning, in the month of June, and when we crossed the river Sanboronbón at sunrise the earth was all white with hoar frost. At noon, we arrived at our destination, and were received by the friars, who embraced and kissed Santos on both cheeks, and took charge of our horses. After breakfast in the kitchen, the day being now warm and pleasant, we went and sat out of doors to sip maté and smoke, and for an hour or longer, the conversation between Santos and the Brothers had been going on when, all at once, a youth appeared coming at a fast gallop towards the gate, shouting as he came, "Los Ingleses! Los Ingleses!" We all jumped up and ran to the gate, and climbing up by the posts and bars, saw at a distance of less than half-a-league to the east, a great army of men marching in the direction of Buenos Ayres. We could see that the foremost part of the army had come to a halt on the banks of a stream which flows past the monastery and empties itself into the Plata, two leagues farther east. The army was all composed of infantry, but a great many persons on horseback could be seen following it. and these,

the young man said, were neighbours who had come out to look at the English invaders; and he also said that the soldiers, on arriving at the stream, had begun to throw away their blankets, and that the people were picking them up. Santos hearing this, said he would go and join the crowd, and mounting his horse and followed by me, and by two of the Brothers, who said they wished to get a few blankets for the monastery, we set out at a gallop for the stream.

Arrived at the spot, we found that the English, not satisfied with the ford, which had a very muddy bottom, had made a new crossing-place for themselves by cutting down the bank on both sides, and that numbers of blankets had been folded and laid in the bed of the stream where it was about twenty-five yards wide. Hundreds of blankets were also being thrown away, and the people were picking them up and loading their horses with them. Santos at once threw himself into the crowd and gathered about a dozen blankets, the best he could find, for the friars; then he gathered a few for himself and ordered me to fasten them on the back of my horse.

The soldiers, seeing us scrambling for the blankets, were much amused; but when one man among us cried out, "These people must be mad to throw their blankets away in cold weather—perhaps their red jackets will keep them warm when they lie down to-night"—there was one soldier who understood, and could speak Spanish, and he replied, "No, sirs, we have no further need of blankets. When we next sleep it will be in the best beds in the capitol." Then Santos shouted back, "That,

sirs, will perhaps be a sleep from which some of you will never awake." That speech attracted their attention to Santos, and the soldier who had spoken before returned, "There are not many men like you in these parts, therefore what you say does not alarm us." Then they looked at the friars fastening the blankets Santos had given them on to their horses, and seeing that they wore heavy iron spurs strapped on their bare feet, they shouted with laughter, and the one who talked with us cried out, "We are sorry, good Brothers, that we have not boots as well as blankets to give you."

But our business was now done, and bidding good-bye to the friars, we set out on our return journey, Santos saying that we should be at home before midnight.

It was past the middle of the afternoon, we having ridden about six leagues, when we spied at a distance ahead a great number of mounted men scattered about over the plain, some standing still, others galloping this way or that.

"El pato! el pato!" cried Santos with excitement, "Come, boy, let us go and watch the battle while it is near, and when it is passed on we will go our way. Urging his horse to a gallop, I following, we came to where the men were struggling for the ball, and stood for a while looking on. But it was not in him to remain a mere spectator for long; never did he see a cattlemarking, or parting, or races, or a dance, or any game, and above all games el Pato, but he must have a part in it. Very soon he dismounted to throw off some of the heaviest parts of his horse-gear, and ordering me to take them up on my horse and follow him, he rode in among the players.

About forty or fifty men had gathered at that spot, and were sitting quietly on their horses in a wide circle, waiting to see the result of a struggle for the Pato between three men who had hold of the ball. They were strong men, well mounted, each resolved to carry off the prize from the others. Sir, when I think of that sight, and remember that the game is no longer played because of the Tyrant who forbade it, I am ready to cry out that there are no longer men on these plains where I first saw the light! How they tugged and strained and sweated, almost dragging each other out of the saddle, their trained horses leaning away, digging their hoofs into the turf, as when they resist the shock of a lassoed animal, when the lasso stiffens and the pull comes! One of the men was a big, powerful mulatto, and the bystanders, thinking the victory would be his, were only waiting to see him wrest the ball from the others to rush upon and try to deprive him of it before he could escape from the crowd.

Santos refused to stand inactive, for was there not a fourth handle to the ball to be grasped by another fighter? Spurring his horse into the group, he very soon succeeded in getting hold of the disengaged handle. A cry of resentment at this action on the part of a stranger went up from some of those who were looking on, mixed with applause at the daring from others, while the three men who had been fighting against each other, each one for himself, now perceived that they had a common enemy. Excited as they were by the struggle, they could not but be startled at the stranger's appearance—that huge man on a big horse, so white-skinned and long-haired, with a

black beard, that came down over his breast, and who showed them, when he threw back his poncho, the knife that was like a sword and the big brass-barrelled pistol worn at his waist. Very soon after he joined in the fray all four men came to the earth. But they did not fall together, and the last to go down was Santos, who would not be dragged off his horse, and in the end horse and man came down on the top of the others. In coming down, two of the men had lost their hold of the ball; last of all, the big mulatto, to save himself from being crushed under the falling horse, was forced to let go, and in his rage at being beaten, he whipped out his long knife against the stranger. Santos, too quick for him, dealt him a blow on the forehead with the heavy silver handle of his whip, dropping him stunned to the ground. Of the four, Santos alone had so far escaped injury, and rising and remounting, the ball still in his hand, he rode out from among them, the crowd opening on each side to make room for him.

Now in the crowd there was one tall, imposing-looking man, wearing a white poncho, many silver ornaments, and a long knife in an embossed silver sheath; his horse, too, which was white as milk, was covered with silver trappings. This man alone raised his voice; "Friends and comrades," he cried, "is this to be the finish? If this stranger is permitted to carry the Pato away, it will not be because of his stronger wrist and better horse, but because he carries firearms. Comrades, what do you say?"

But there was no answer. They had seen the power

and resolution of the man, and though they were many they preferred to let him go in peace. Then the man on a white horse, with a scowl of anger and contempt, turned from them and began following us at a distance of about fifty yards. Whenever Santos turned back to come to close quarters with him, he retired, only to turn and follow us again as soon as Santos resumed his course. In this way we rode till sunset. Santos was grave, but calm; I, being so young, was in constant terror. "Oh, uncle," I whispered, "for the love of God fire your pistol at this man and kill him, so that he may not kill us!"

Santos laughed. "Fool of a boy," he replied, "do you know that he wants me to fire at him! He knows that I could not hit him at this distance, and that after discharging my pistol we should be equal, man to man, and knife to knife; and who knows then which would kill the other? God knows best, since He knows everything, and He has put it into my heart not to fire."

When it grew dark we rode slower, and the man then lessened the distance between us. We could hear the chink-chink of his silver trappings, and when I looked back I could see a white misty form following us like a ghost. Then, all at once, there came a noise of hoofs and a whistling sound of something thrown, and Santos' horse plunged and reared and kicked, then stood still trembling with terror. His hind legs were entangled in the bolas which had been thrown. With a curse Santos threw himself off, and, drawing his knife, cut the thong which bound the animal's legs, and remounting we went on as before, the white figure still following us.

At length, about midnight, the Sanborombón was reached, at the ford where we had crossed in the morning, where it was about forty yards wide, and the water only high as the surcingle in the deepest parts.

"Let your heart be glad, Nicandro!" said Santos, as we went down into the water; "for our time is come now, and be careful to do as I bid you."

We crossed slowly, and coming out on the south side, Santos quietly dropped off his horse, and, speaking in a low voice, ordered me to ride slowly on with the two horses and wait for him in the road. He said that the man who followed would not see him crouching under the bank, and thinking it safe would cross over, only to receive the charge fired at a few yards distance.

That was an anxious interval that followed, I waiting alone, scarcely daring to breathe, staring into the darkness in fear of that white figure that was like a ghost, listening for the pistol shot. My prayer to heaven was to direct the bullet in its course, so that it might go to that terrible man's heart, and we be delivered from him. But there was no shot, and no sound except a faint chink of silver and sound of hoof-beats that came to my ears after a time, and soon ceased to be heard. The man, perhaps, had some suspicion of the other's plan and had given up the chase and gone away.

Nothing more do I remember of that journey which ended at El Ombú at cock-crow, except that at one spot Santos fastened a thong round my waist and bound me before and behind to the saddle to prevent my falling from my horse every time I went to sleep.

CHAPTER III

REMEMBER, Señor, that I have spoken of things that passed when I was small. The memories of that time are few and scattered, like the fragments of tiles and bricks and rusty iron which one may find half-buried among the weeds, where the house once stood. Fragments that once formed part of the building. Certain events, some faces, and some voices, I remember, but I cannot say the year. Nor can I say how many years had gone by after Doña Mericie's death, and after my journey to the monastery. Perhaps they were few, perhaps many. Invasions had come, wars with a foreigner and with the savages, and Independence, and many things had happened at a distance. He, Santos Ugarte, was older, I know, greyer, when that great misfortune and calamity came to one whom God had created so strong, so brave, so noble. And all on account of a slave, a youth born at El Ombú, who had been preferred above the others by his master. For, as it is said, we breed crows to pick our eyes out. But I will say nothing against that poor youth, who was the cause of the disaster, for it was not wholly his fault. Part of the fault was in Santos—his indomitable temper and his violence. And perhaps, too, the time was come when He who rules over all men had said, "You have raised your voice and have ridden over others

long enough. Look, Santos! I shall set My foot upon you, and you shall be like a wild pumpkin at the end of summer, when it is dryer and more brittle that an empty egg-shell."

Remember that there were slaves in those days, also that there was a law fixing every man's price, old or young, so that if any slave went, money in hand, to his master and offered him the price of his liberty, from that moment he became a free man. It mattered not that his master wished not to sell him. So just was the law.

Of his slaves Santos was accustomed to say, "These are my children, and serve because they love me, not because they are slaves; and if I were to offer his freedom to any one among them, he would refuse to take it." He saw their faces, not their hearts.

His favourite was Meliton, black but well favoured, and though but a youth, he had authority over the others, and dressed well, and rode his master's best horses, and had horses of his own. But it was never said of him that he gained that eminence by means of flattery and a tongue cunning to frame lies. On the contrary, he was loved by all, even by those he was set above, because of his goodness of heart and a sweet and gay disposition. He was one of those who can do almost anything better than others; whatever his master wanted done, whether it was to ride a race, or break a horse, or throw a lasso, or make a bridle, or whip, or surcingle, or play on a guitar, or sing, or dance, it was Meliton, Meliton. There was no one like him.

Now this youth cherished a secret ambition in his heart, and saved, and saved his money; and at length one day he came with a handful of silver and gold to Santos, and said, "Master, here is the price of my freedom, take it and count it, and see that it is right, and let me remain at El Ombú to serve you henceforth without payment. But I shall no longer be a slave."

Santos took the money into his hand, and spoke, "It was for this then that you saved, even the money I gave you to spend and to run with, and the money you made by selling the animals I gave you—you saved it for this! Ingrate, with a heart blacker than your skin! Take back the money, and go from my presence, and never cross my path again if you wish for a long life." And with that he hurled the handful of silver and gold into the young man's face with such force that he was cut and bruised with the coins and well nigh stunned. He went back staggering to his horse, and mounting, rode away, sobbing like a child, the blood running from his face.

He soon left this neighbourhood and went to live at Las Vivoras, on the Vecino river, south of Dolores, and there made good use of his freedom, buying fat animals for the market; and for a space of two years he prospered, and every man, rich or poor, was his friend. Nevertheless he was not happy, for his heart was loyal and he loved his old master, who had been a father to him, and desired above all things to be forgiven. And, at length, hoping that Santos had outlived his resentment and would be pleased to see him again, he one day came to El Ombú and asked to see the master.

The old man came out of the house and greeted him jovially. "Ha, Meliton," he cried with a laugh, "you have returned in spite of my warning. Come down from your horse and let me take your hand once more."

The other, glad to think he was forgiven, alighted, and advancing, put out his hand. Santos took it in his, only to crush it with so powerful a grip, that the young man cried out aloud, and blinded with tears of pain, he did not see that his master had the big brass pistol in his left hand, and did not know that his last moment had come. He fell with a bullet in his heart.

Look, señor, where I am pointing, twenty yards or so from the edge of the shadow of the ombú, do you see a dark green weed with a yellow flower on a tall stem growing on the short, dry grass? It was just there, on the very spot where the yellow flower is, that poor Meliton fell, and was left lying, covered with blood, until noon the next day. For no person dared take up the corpse until the Alcalde had been informed of the matter and had come to inquire into it.

Santos had mounted his horse and gone away without a word, taking the road to Buenos Ayres. He had done that for which he would have to pay dearly; for a life is a life, whether the skin be black or white, and no man can slay another deliberately, in cold blood, and escape the penalty. The law is no respecter of persons, and when he, who commits such a deed, is a man of substance, he must expect that Advocates and Judges, with all those who take up his cause, will bleed him well before they procure him a pardon.

Ugarte cared nothing for that, he had been as good as his word, and the devil in his heart was satisfied. Only he would not wait at his estancia to be taken, nor would he go and give himself up to the authorities, who would then have to place him in confinement, and it would be many months before his liberation. That would be like suffocation to him; to such a man a prison is like a tomb. No, he would go to Buenos Ayres and embark for Montevideo, and from that place he would put the matter in motion, and wait there until it was all settled and he was free to return to El Ombú.

Dead Meliton was taken away and buried in consecrated ground at Chascomus. Rain fell, and washed away the red stains on the ground. In the spring, the swallows returned and built their nests under the eaves; but Ugarte came not back, nor did any certain tidings of him reach us. It was said, I know not whether truly or not, that the Advocate who defended him, and the Judge of First Instance, who had the case before him, had quarrelled about the division of the reward, and both being rich, proud persons, they had allowed themselves to forget the old man waiting there month after month for his pardon, which never came to him.

Better for him if he never heard of the ruin which had fallen on El Ombú during his long exile. There was no one in authority: the slaves, left to themselves, went away, and there was no person to restrain them. As for the cattle and horses, they were blown away like thistledown, and everyone was free to pasture his herds and flocks on the land.

The house for a time was in charge of some person placed there by the authorities, but little by little it was emptied of its contents; and at last it was abandoned, and for a long time no one could be found to live in it on account of the ghosts.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was living at that time, a few leagues from El Ombú, one Valerio de la Cueva, a poor man, whose all consisted of a small flock of three or four hundred sheep and a few horses. He had been allowed to make a small rancho, a mere hut, to shelter himself and his wife Donata and their one child, a boy named Bruno; and to pay for the grass his few sheep consumed he assisted in the work at the estancia house. This poor man, hearing of El Ombú, where he could have house and ground for nothing, offered himself as occupant, and in time came with wife and child and his small flock, and all the furniture he possessed—a bed, two or three chairs, a pot and kettle, and perhaps a few other things. Such poverty El Ombú had not known, but all others had feared to inhabit such a place on account of its evil name, so that it was left for Valerio, who was a stranger in the district.

Tell me, señor, have you ever in your life met with a man, who was perhaps poor, or even clothed in rags, and who yet when you had looked at and conversed with him, has caused you to say: Here is one who is like no other man in the world? Perhaps on rising and going out, on some clear morning in summer, he looked at the sun when it rose, and perceived an angel sitting in it, and as he gazed, something from that being fell upon and passed into and

STORY OF A PIEBALD HORSE

STORY OF A PIEBALD HORSE

THIS is all about a piebald. People there are like birds that come down in flocks, hop about chattering, gobble up their seed, then fly away, forgetting what they have swallowed. I love not to scatter grain for such as these. With you, friend, it is different. Others may laugh if they like at the old man of many stories, who puts all things into his copper memory. I can laugh, too, knowing that all things are ordered by destiny; otherwise I might sit down and cry.

The things I have seen! There was the piebald that died long ago; I could take you to the very spot where his bones used to lie bleaching in the sun. There is a nettle growing on the spot. I saw it yesterday. What important things are these to remember and talk about! Bones of a dead horse and a nettle; a young bird that falls from its nest in the night and is found dead in the morning: puffballs blown about by the wind: a little lamb left behind by the flock bleating at night amongst the thorns and thistles, where only the fox or wild dog can hear it! Small matters are these, and our lives, what are they? And the people we have known, the men and women who have spoken to us and touched us with warm hands—the bright eyes and red lips! Can we cast these things like dead leaves on the fire? Can we lie down full

of heaviness because of them, and sleep and rise in the morning without them ? Ah, friend !

Let us to the story of the piebald. There was a cattle-marking at neighbour Sotelo's estancia, and out of a herd of three thousand head we had to part all the yearlings to be branded. After that, dinner and a dance. At sunrise we gathered, about thirty of us, all friends and neighbours, to do the work. Only with us came one person nobody knew. He joined us when we were on our way to the cattle ; a young man, slender, well-formed, of pleasing countenance and dressed as few could dress in those days. His horse also shone with silver trappings. And what an animal ! Many horses have I seen in this life, but never one with such a presence as this young stranger's piebald.

Arrived at the herd, we began to separate the young animals, the men riding in couples through the cattle, so that each calf when singled out could be driven by two horsemen, one on each side, to prevent it from doubling back. I happened to be mounted on a demon with a fiery mouth—there was no making him work, so I had to leave the parters and stand with little to do, watching the yearlings already parted, to keep them from returning to the herd.

Presently neighbour Chapaco rode up to me. He was a good-hearted man, well-spoken, half Indian and half Christian ; but he also had another half, and that was devil.

" What ! neighbour Lucero, are you riding on a donkey or a goat, that you remain here doing boy's work ? "

I began telling him about my horse, but he did not listen; he was looking at the parters.

"Who is that young stranger?" he asked.

"I see him to-day," I replied, "and if I see him again to-morrow then I shall have seen him twice."

"And in what country of which I have never heard did he learn cattle-parting?" said he.

"He rides," I answered, "like one presuming on a good horse. But he is safe, his fellow-worker has all the danger."

"I believe you," said Chapaco. "He charges furiously and hurls the heifer before his comrade, who has all the work to keep it from doubling, and all the danger, for at any moment his horse may go over it and fall. This our young stranger does knowingly, thinking that no one here will resent it. No, Lucero, he is presuming more on his long knife than on his good horse."

Even while we spoke, the two we were watching rode up to us. Chapaco saluted the young man, taking off his hat, and said—"Will you take me for a partner, friend?"

"Yes; why not, friend?" returned the other; and together the two rode back to the herd.

Now I shall watch them, said I to myself, to see what this Indian devil intends doing. Soon they came out of the herd driving a very small animal. Then I knew what was coming. "May your guardian angel be with you to avert a calamity, young stranger!" I exclaimed. Whip and spur those two came towards me like men riding a race and not parting cattle. Chapaco kept close to the calf, so that he had the advantage, for his horse was well

trained. At length he got a little ahead, then, quick as lightning, he forced the calf round square before the other. The piebald struck it full in the middle, and fell because it had to fall. But, Saints in Heaven! why did not the rider save himself? Those who were watching saw him throw up his feet to tread his horse's neck and leap away; nevertheless man, horse, and calf, came down together. They ploughed the ground for some distance so great had been their speed, and the man was under. When we picked him up he was senseless, the blood flowing from his mouth. Next morning, when the sun rose and God's light fell on the earth, he expired.

Of course there was no dancing that night. Some of the people, after eating, went away; others remained sitting about all night, talking in low tones, waiting for the end. A few of us were at his bedside watching his white face and closed eyes. He breathed, and that was all. When the sunlight came over the world he opened his eyes, and Sotelo asked him how he did. He took no notice, but presently his lips began to move, though they seemed to utter no sound. Sotelo bent his ear down to listen. "Where does she live?" he asked. He could not answer—he was dead.

"He seemed to be saying many things," Sotelo told us, "but I understood only this—'Tell her to forgive me . . . I was wrong. She loved him from the first . . . I was jealous, and hated him. . . . Tell Elaria not to grieve—Anacleto will be good to her.' Alas! my friends, where shall I find his relations to deliver this dying message to them?"

The Alcalde came that day and made a list of the dead man's possessions, and bade Sotelo take charge of them till the relations could be found. Then, calling all the people together, he bade each person cut on his whip-handle and on the sheath of his knife the mark branded on the flank of the piebald, which was in shape like a horse-shoe with a cross inside, so that it might be shown to all strangers, and made known through the country until the dead man's relations should hear of it.

When a year had gone by, the Alcalde told Sotelo that, all inquiries having failed, he could now take the piebald and the silver trappings for himself. Sotelo would not listen to this, for he was a devout man and coveted no person's property, dead or alive. The horse and things, however, still remained in his charge.

Three years later I was one afternoon sitting with Sotelo, taking maté, when his herd of dun mares were driven up. They came galloping and neighing to the corral and ahead of them, looking like a wild horse, was the piebald, for no person ever mounted him.

"Never do I look on that horse," I remarked, "without remembering the fatal marking, when its master met his death."

"Now you speak of it," said he, "let me inform you that I am about to try a new plan. That noble piebald and all those silver trappings hanging in my room are always reproaching my conscience. Let us not forget the young stranger we put under ground. I have had many masses said for his soul's repose, but that does not quite satisfy me. Somewhere there is a place where he

is not forgotten. Hands there are, perhaps, that gather wild flowers to place them with lighted candles before the image of the Blessed Virgin; eyes there are that weep and watch for his coming. You know how many travellers and cattle-drovers going to Buenos Ayres from the south call for refreshment at the *pulperia*. I intend taking the piebald and tying him every day at the gate there. No person calling will fail to notice the horse, and some day perhaps some traveller will recognise the brand on its flank and will be able to tell us what department and what estancia it comes from."

I did not believe anything would result from this, but said nothing, not wishing to discourage him.

Next morning the piebald was tied up at the gate of the *pulperia*, at the road side, only to be released again when night came, and this was repeated every day for a long time. So fine an animal did not fail to attract the attention of all strangers passing that way, still several weeks went by and nothing was discovered. At length, one evening, just when the sun was setting, there appeared a troop of cattle driven by eight men. It had come a great distance, for the troop was a large one—about nine hundred head—and they moved slowly, like cattle that had been many days on the road. Some of the men came in for refreshments; then the store-keeper noticed that one remained outside leaning on the gate.

"What is the capatas doing that he remains outside?" said one of the men.

"Evidently he has fallen in love with that piebald," said another, "for he cannot take his eyes off it."

At length the capatas, a young man of good presence, came in and sat down on a bench. The others were talking and laughing about the strange things they had all been doing the day before; for they had been many days and nights on the road, only nodding a little in their saddles, and at length becoming delirious from want of sleep, they had begun to act like men that are half-crazed.

"Enough of the delusions of yesterday," said the capatas, who had been silently listening to them, "but tell me, boys, am I in the same condition to-day?"

"Surely not!" they replied. "Thanks to those horned devils being so tired and footsore, we all had some sleep last night."

"Very well then," said he, "now you have finished eating and drinking, go back to the troop, but before you leave look well at that piebald tied at the gate. He that is not a cattle-drover may ask, 'How can my eyes deceive me?' but I know that a crazy brain makes us see many strange things when the drowsy eyes can only be held open with the fingers."

The men did as they were told, and when they had looked well at the piebald, they all shouted out, "He has the brand of the estancia de Silva on his flank, and no counter-brand—claim the horse, capatas, for he is yours." And after that they rode away to the herd.

"My friend," said the capatas to the store-keeper, "will you explain how you came possessed of this piebald horse?"

Then the other told him everything, even the dying words of the young stranger, for he knew all.

The capatas bent down his head, and covering his face shed tears. Then he said, "And you died thus, Torcuato, amongst strangers! From my heart I have forgiven you the wrong you did me. Heaven rest your soul, Torcuato; I cannot forget that we were once brothers.' I, friend, am that Anacleto of whom he spoke with his last breath."

Sotelo was then sent for, and when he arrived and the *pulperia* was closed for the night, the capatas told his story, which I will give you in his own words, for I was also present to hear him. This is what he told us:—

I was born on the southern frontier. My parents died when I was very small, but Heaven had compassion on me and raised up one to shelter me in my orphanhood. Don Loreto Silva took me to his estancia on the Sarandi, a stream half a day's journey from Tandil, towards the setting sun. He treated me like one of his own children, and I took the name of Silva. He had two other children, Torcuato, who was about the same age as myself, and his daughter, Elaria, who was younger. He was a widower when he took charge of me, and died when I was still a youth. After his death we moved to Tandil, where we had a house close to the little town; for we were all minors, and the property had been left to be equally divided between us when we should be of age. For four years we lived happily together; ,then when we were of age we preferred to keep the property undivided. I proposed that we should go and live on the estancia, but Torcuato would not consent, liking the place where we were living best. Finally, not being able to persuade him, I resolved

to go and attend to the estancia myself. He said that I could please myself and that he should stay where he was with Elaria. It was only when I told Elaria of these things that I knew how much I loved her. She wept and implored me not to leave her.

"Why do you shed tears, Elaria?" I said; "is it because you love me? Know, then, that I also love you with all my heart, and if you will be mine, nothing can ever make us unhappy. Do not think that my absence at the estancia will deprive me of this feeling which has ever been growing up in me."

"I do love you, Anacleto," she replied, "and I have also known of your love for a long time. But there is something in my heart which I cannot impart to you; only I ask you, for the love you bear me, do not leave me, and do not ask me why I say this to you."

After this appeal I could not leave her, nor did I ask her to tell me her secret. Torcuato and I were friendly, but not as we had been before this difference. I had no evil thoughts of him; I loved him and was with him continually; but from the moment I announced to him that I had changed my mind about going to the estancia, and was silent when he demanded the reason, there was a something in him which made it different between us. I could not open my heart to him about Elaria, and sometimes I thought that he also had a secret which he had no intention of sharing with me. This coldness did not, however, distress me very much, so great was the happiness I now experienced, knowing that I possessed Elaria's love. He was much away from the house, being fond of amusements,

and he had also begun to gamble. About three months passed in this way, when one morning Torcuato, who was saddling his horse to go out, said, "Will you come with me, to-day, Anacleto?"

"I do not care to go," I answered.

"Look, Anacleto," said he; "once you were always ready to accompany me to a race or dance, or cattle-marking. Why have you ceased to care for these things? Are you growing devout before your time, or does my company no longer please you?"

"It is best to tell him everything and have done with secrets," said I to myself, and so replied—

"Since you ask me, Torcuato, I will answer you frankly. It is true that I now take less pleasure than formerly in these pastimes; but you have not guessed the reason rightly."

"What then is this reason of which you speak?"

"Since you cannot guess it," I replied, "know that it is love."

"Love for whom?" he asked quickly, and turning very pale.

"Do you need ask? Elaria," I replied.

I had scarcely uttered the name before he turned on me full of rage.

"Elaria!" he exclaimed. "Do you dare tell me of love for Elaria! But you are only a blind fool, and do not know that I am going to marry her myself."

"Are you mad, Torcuato, to talk of marrying your sister?"

"She is no more my sister than you are my brother," he

returned. "I," he continued, striking his breast passionately, "am the only child of my father, Loreto Silva. Elaria, whose mother died in giving her birth, was adopted by my parents. And because she is going to be my wife, I am willing that she should have a share of the property; but you, a miserable foundling, why were you lifted up so high? Was it not enough that you were clothed and fed till you came to man's estate? Not a hand's-breadth of the estancia land should be yours by right, and now you presume to speak of love for Elaria."

My blood was on fire with so many insults, but I remembered all the benefits I had received from his father, and did not raise my hand against him. Without more words he left me. I then hastened to Elaria and told her what had passed.

"This," I said, "is the secret you would not impart to me. Why, when you knew these things, was I kept in ignorance?"

"Have pity on me, Anacleto," she replied, crying. "Did I not see that you two were no longer friends and brothers, and this without knowing of each other's love? I dared not open my lips to you or to him. It is always a woman's part to suffer in silence. God intended us to be poor, Anacleto, for we were both born of poor parents, and had this property never come to us, how happy we might have been!"

"Why do you say such things, Elaria? Since we love each other, we cannot be unhappy, rich or poor."

"Is it a little matter," she replied, "that Torcuato must be our bitter enemy? But you do not know everything.

Before Torcuato's father died, he said he wished his son to marry me when we came of age. When he spoke about it we were sitting together by his bed."

"And what did you say, Elaria?" I asked, full of concern.

"Torcuato promised to marry me. I only covered my face, and was silent, for I loved you best even then, though I was almost a child, and my heart was filled with grief at his words. After we came here, Torcuato reminded me of his father's words. I answered that I did not wish to marry him, that he was only a brother to me. Then he said that we were young and he could wait until I was of another mind. This is all I have to say; but how shall we three live together any longer? I cannot bear to part from you, and every moment I tremble to think what may happen when you two are together."

"Fear nothing," I said. "To-morrow morning you can go to spend a week at some friend's house in the town; then I will speak to Torcuato, and tell him that since we cannot live in peace together we must separate. Even if he answers with insults I shall do nothing to grieve you, and if he refuses to listen to me, I shall send some person we both respect to arrange all things between us."

This satisfied her, but as evening approached she grew paler, and I knew she feared Torcuato's return. He did not, however, come back that night. Early next morning she was ready to leave. It was an easy walk to the town-but the dew was heavy on the grass, and I saddled a horse for her to ride. I had just lifted her to the saddle when Torcuato appeared. He came at great speed, and throwing

himself off his horse, advanced to us. Elaria trembled and seemed ready to sink upon the earth to hide herself like a partridge that has seen the hawk. I prepared myself for insults and perhaps violence. He never looked at me; he only spoke to her.

"Elaria," he said, "something has happened—something that obliges me to leave this house and neighbourhood at once. Remember when I am away that my father, who cherished you and enriched you with his bounty, and who also cherished and enriched this ingrate, spoke to us from his dying bed and made me promise to marry you, Think what his love was; do not forget that his last wish is sacred, and that Anacleto has acted a base, treacherous part in trying to steal you from me. He was lifted out of the mire to be my brother and equal in everything except this. He has got a third part of my inheritance—let that satisfy him; your own heart, Elaria, will tell you that a marriage with him would be a crime before God and man. Look not for my return to-morrow nor for many days. But if you two begin to laugh at my father's dying wishes, look for me, for then I shall not delay to come back to you, Elaria, and to you, Anacleto. I have spoken."

He then mounted his horse and rode away. Very soon we learned the cause of his sudden departure. He had quarrelled over his cards and in a struggle that followed had stabbed his adversary to the heart. He had fled to escape the penalty. We did not believe that he would remain long absent; for Torcuato was very young, well off, and much liked, and this was, moreover, his first

offence against the law. But time went on and he did not return, nor did any message from him reach us, and we at last concluded that he had left the country. Only now, after four years, have I accidentally discovered his fate through seeing his piebald horse.

After he had been absent over a year, I asked Elaria to become my wife. "We cannot marry till Torcuato returns," she said. "For if we take the property that ought to have been all his, and at the same time disobey his father's dying wish, we shall be doing an evil thing. Let us take care of the property till he returns to receive it all back from us; then, Anacleto, we shall be free to marry."

I consented, for she was more to me than lands and cattle. I put the estancia in order, and leaving a trustworthy person in charge of everything I invested my money in fat bullocks to resell in Buenos Ayres, and in this business I have been employed ever since. From the estancia I have taken nothing, and now it must all come back to us—his inheritance and ours. This is a bitter thing and will give Elaria great grief.

Thus ended Anacleto's story, and when he had finished speaking and still seemed greatly troubled in his mind, Sotelo said to him, "Friend, let me advise you what to do. You will now shortly be married to the woman you love and probably some day a son will be born to you. Let him be named Torcuato, and let Torcuato's inheritance be kept for him. And if God gives you no son, remember what was done for you and for the girl you are going to marry, when you were orphans and friendless, and look

out for some unhappy child in the same condition, to protect and enrich him as you were enriched."

"You have spoken well," said Anacleto. "I will report your words to Elaria, and whatever she wishes done that will I do."

So ends my story, friend. The cattle-drover left us that night and we saw no more of him. Only before going he gave the piebald and the silver trappings to Sotelo. Six months after his visit, Sotelo also received a letter from him to say that his marriage with Elaria had taken place; and the letter was accompanied with a present of seven cream-coloured horses with black manes and hoofs.

NIÑO DIABLO

NIÑO DIABLO

THE wide pampa rough with long grass ; a vast level disc now growing dark, the horizon encircling it with a ring as faultless as that made by a pebble dropped into smooth water ; above it the clear sky of June, wintry and pale, still showing in the west the saffron hues of the afterglow tinged with vapoury violet and grey. In the centre of the disc a large, low rancho thatched with yellow rushes, a few stunted trees and cattle enclosures grouped about it ; and dimly seen in the shadows, cattle and sheep reposing. At the gate stands Gregory Gorostiaga, lord of house, lands and ruminating herds, leisurely unsaddling his horse ; for whatsoever Gregory does is done leisurely. Although no person is within earshot he talks much over his task, now rebuking his restive animal, and now cursing his benumbed fingers and the hard knots in his gear. A curse falls readily and not without a certain natural grace from Gregory's lips ; it is the oiled feather with which he touches every difficult knot encountered in life. From time to time he glances towards the open kitchen door, from which issue the far-flaring light of the fire and familiar voices, with savoury smells of cookery that come to his nostrils like pleasant messengers.

The unsaddling over at last the freed horse gallops away, neighing joyfully, to seek his fellows ; but Gregory

is not a four-footed thing to hurry himself; and so, stepping slowly and pausing frequently to look about him as if reluctant to quit the cold night air, he turns towards the house.

The spacious kitchen was lighted by two or three wicks in cups of melted fat, and by a great fire in the middle of the clay floor that cast crowds of dancing shadows on the walls and filled the whole room with grateful warmth. On the walls were fastened many deer's heads, and on their convenient prongs were hung bridles and lassos, ropes of onions and garlics, bunches of dried herbs, and various other objects. At the fire a piece of beef was roasting on a spit; and in a large pot suspended by hook and chain from the smoke-blackened central beam, boiled and bubbled an ocean of mutton broth, puffing out white clouds of steam redolent of herbs and cummin-seed. Close to the fire, skimmer in hand, sat Magdalen, Gregory's fat and florid wife, engaged in frying pies in a second smaller pot. There also, on a high, straight-backed chair, sat Ascension, her sister-in-law, a wrinkled spinster; also, in a low rush-bottomed seat, her mother-in-law, an ancient white-headed dame, staring vacantly into the flames. On the other side of the fire were Gregory's two eldest daughters, occupied just now in serving maté to their elders—that harmless bitter decoction the sipping of which fills up all vacant moments from dawn to bed-time—pretty dove-eyed girls of sixteen, both also named Magdalen, but not after their mother nor because confusion was loved by the family for its own sake; they were twins, and born on the day sacred to Santa

Magdalena. Slumbering dogs and cats were disposed about the floor, also four children. The eldest, a boy sitting with legs outstretched before him, was cutting threads from a slip of colt's hide looped over his great toe. The two next, boy and girl, were playing a simple game called nines, once known to English children as nine men's morrice; the lines were rudely scratched on the clay floor, and the men they played with were bits of hardened clay, nine red and as many white. The youngest, a girl of five, sat on the floor nursing a kitten that purred contentedly on her lap and drowsily winked its blue eyes at the fire and as she swayed herself from side to side she lisped out the old lullaby in her baby voice:

A-ro-ró mi niño
A-ro-ró mi sol,
A-ro-ró pedazos
De mi corazon.

Gregory stood on the threshold surveying this domestic scene with manifest pleasure.

"Papa mine, what have you brought me?" cried the child with the kitten.

"Brought you, interested? Stiff whiskers and cold hands to pinch your dirty little cheeks. How is your cold to-night, mother?"

"Yes, son, it is very cold to-night; we knew that before you came in," replied the old dame testily as she drew her chair a little closer to the fire.

"It is useless speaking to her," remarked Ascension. "With her to be out of temper is to be deaf."

"What has happened to put her out?" he asked.

"I can tell you, papa," cried one of the twins. "She wouldn't let me make your cigars to-day, and sat down out of doors to make them herself. It was after breakfast when the sun was warm."

"And of course she fell asleep," chimed in Ascension.

"Let me tell it, auntie!" exclaimed the other. "And she fell asleep, and in a moment Rosita's lamb came and ate up the whole of the tobacco-leaf in her lap."

"It didn't!" cried Rosita, looking up from her game. "I opened its mouth and looked with all my eyes, and there was no tobacco-leaf in it."

"That lamb! that lamb!" said Gregory slily. "Is it to be wondered at that we are turning grey before our time—all except Rosita! Remind me to-morrow, wife, to take it to the flock; or if it has grown fat on all the tobacco-leaf, aprons and old shoes it has eaten——"

"Oh, no, no, no!" screamed Rosita, starting up and throwing the game into confusion, just when her little brother had made a row and was in the act of seizing on one of her pieces in triumph.

"Hush, silly child, he will not harm your lamb," said the mother, pausing from her task and raising eyes that were tearful with the smoke of the fire and of the cigarette she held between her good-humoured lips. "And now, if these children have finished speaking of their important affairs, tell me, Gregory, what news do you bring?"

"They say," he returned, sitting down and taking the maté-cup from his daughter's hand, "that the invading Indians bring seven hundred lances, and that those that

first opposed them were all slain. Some say they are now retreating with the cattle they have taken; while others maintain that they are waiting to fight our men."

"Oh, my sons, my sons, what will happen to them!" cried Magdalen, bursting into tears.

"Why do you cry, wife, before God gives you cause?" returned her husband. "Are not all men born to fight the infidel? Our boys are not alone—all their friends and neighbours are with them."

"Say not this to me, Gregory, for I am not a fool nor blind. All their friends indeed! And this very day I have seen the Niño Diablo; he galloped past the house, whistling like a partridge that knows no care. Why must my two sons be called away, while he, a youth without occupation and with no mother to cry for him, remains behind?"

"You talk folly, Magdalen," replied her lord. "Complain that the ostrich and puma are more favoured than your sons, since no man calls on them to serve the state; but mention not the Niño, for he is freer than the wild things which Heaven has made, and fights not on this side nor on that."

"Coward! Miserable!" murmured the incensed mother.

Whereupon one of the twins flushed scarlet, and retorted, "He is not a coward, mother!"

"And if not a coward why does he sit on the hearth among women and old men in times like these? Grieved am I to hear a daughter of mine speak in defence of one who is a vagabond and a stealer of other men's horses!"

The girl's eyes flashed angrily, but she answered not a word.

"Hold your tongue, woman, and accuse no man of crimes," spoke Gregory. "Let every Christian take proper care of his animals; and as for the infidel's horses, he is a virtuous man that steals them. The girl speaks truth; the Niño is no coward, but he fights not with our weapons. The web of the spider is coarse and ill-made compared with the snare he spreads to entangle his prey." Thus fixing his eyes on the face of the girl who had spoken, he added: "therefore be warned in season, my daughter, and fall not into the snare of the Niño Diablo."

Again the girl blushed and hung her head.

At this moment a clatter of hoofs, the jangling of a bell, and shouts of a traveller to the horses driven before him, came in at the open door. The dogs roused themselves, almost overturning the children in their hurry to rush out; and up rose Gregory to find out who was approaching with so much noise.

"I know, *papita*," cried one of the children. "It is Uncle Polycarp."

"You are right, child," said her father. "Cousin Polycarp always arrives at night, shouting to his animals like a troop of Indians." And with that he went out to welcome his boisterous relative.

The traveller soon arrived, spurring his horse, scared at the light and snorting loudly, to within two yards of the door. In a few minutes the saddle was thrown off, the fore feet of the bell-mare fettered, and the horses allowed

to wander away in quest of pasturage; then the two men turned into the kitchen.

A short, burly man aged about fifty, wearing a soft hat thrust far back on his head, with truculent greenish eyes beneath arched, bushy eyebrows, and a thick shapeless nose surmounting a bristly moustache—such was Cousin Polycarp. From neck to feet he was covered with a blue cloth poncho, and on his heels he wore enormous silver spurs that clanked and jangled over the floor like the fetters of a convict. After greeting the women and bestowing the avuncular blessing on the children, who had clamoured for it as for some inestimable boon—he sat down, and flinging back his poncho displayed at his waist a huge silver-hilted knife and a heavy brass-barrelled horse-pistol.

"Heaven be praised for its goodness, Cousin Magdalen," he said. "What with pies and spices your kitchen is more fragrant than a garden of flowers. That's as it should be, for nothing but rum have I tasted this bleak day. And the boys are away fighting, Gregory tells me. Good! When the eaglets have found out their wings let them try their talons. What, Cousin Magdalen, crying for the boys! Would you have had them girls?"

"Yes, a thousand times," she replied, drying her wet eyes on her apron.

"Ah, Magdalen, daughters can't be always young and sweet-tempered, like your brace of pretty partridges yonder. They grow old, Cousin Magdalen—old and ugly and spiteful; and are more bitter and worthless than the wild pumpkin. But I speak not of those who are present,

for I would say nothing to offend my respected Cousin Ascension, whom may God preserve, though she never married."

"Listen to me, Cousin Polycarp," returned the insulted dame so pointedly alluded to. "Say nothing to me nor of me, and I will also hold my peace concerning you; for you know very well that if I were disposed to open my lips I could say a thousand things."

"Enough, enough, you have already said them a thousand times," he interrupted. "I know all that, cousin; let us say no more."

"That is only what I ask," she retorted, "for I have never loved to bandy words with you; and you know already, therefore I need not recall it to your mind, that if I am single it is not because some men whose names I could mention if I felt disposed—and they are the names not of dead but of living men—would not have been glad to marry me; but because I preferred my liberty and the goods I inherited from my father; and I see not what advantage there is in being the wife of one who is a brawler and a drunkard and spender of other people's money, and I know not what besides."

"There it is!" said Polycarp, appealing to the fire. "I knew that I had thrust my foot into a red ants' nest—careless that I am! But in truth, Ascension, it was fortunate for you in those distant days you mention that you hardened your heart against all lovers. For wives, like cattle that must be branded with their owner's mark, are first of all taught submission to their husbands; and consider, cousin, what tears! what sufferings!" And having

ended thus abruptly, he planted his elbows on his knees and busied himself with the cigarette he had been trying to roll up with his cold, drunken fingers for the last five minutes.

Ascension gave a nervous twitch at the red cotton kerchief on her head, and cleared her throat with a sound "sharp and short like the shrill swallow's cry," when——

"*Madre del Cielo*, how you frightened me!" screamed one of the twins, giving a great start.

The cause of this sudden outcry was discovered in the presence of a young man quietly seated on the bench at the girl's side. He had not been there a minute before, and no person had seen him enter the room—what wonder that the girl was startled! He was slender in form and had small hands and feet, and oval, olive face, smooth as a girl's except for the incipient moustache on his lip. In place of a hat he wore only a scarlet ribbon bound about his head, to keep back the glossy black hair that fell to his shoulders; and he was wrapped in a white woollen Indian poncho, while his lower limbs were cased in white colt-skin coverings, shaped like stockings to his feet, with the red tassels of his embroidered garters falling to the ankles.

"The Niño Diablo!" all cried in a breath, the children manifesting the greatest joy at his appearance. But old Gregory spoke with affected anger. "Why do you always drop on us in this treacherous way, like rain through a leaky thatch?" he exclaimed. "Keep these strange arts for your visits in the infidel country; here we are all Christians, and praise God on the threshold when we visit a neighbour's house. And now, Niño Diablo, what news of the Indians?"

"Nothing do I know and little do I concern myself about specks on the horizon," returned the visitor with a light laugh. And at once all the children gathered round him, for the Niño they considered to belong to them when he came, and not to their elders with their solemn talk about Indian warfare and lost horses. And now, now he would finish that wonderful story, long in the telling, of the little girl alone and lost in the great desert, and surrounded by all the wild animals met to discuss what they should do with her. It was a grand story, even mother Magdalen listened, though she pretended all the time to be thinking only of her pies—and the teller, like the grand old historians of other days, put most eloquent speeches, all made out of his own head, into the lips (and beaks) of the various actors—puma, ostrich, deer, cavy, and the rest.

In the midst of this performance supper was announced, and all gathered willingly round a dish of Magdalen's pies, filled with minced meat, hard-boiled eggs chopped small, raisins, and plenty of spice. After the pies came roast beef; and, finally, great basins of mutton broth fragrant with herbs and cummin-seed. The rage of hunger satisfied, each one said a prayer, the elders murmuring with bowed heads, the children on their knees uplifting shrill voices. Then followed the concluding semi-religious ceremony of the day, when each child in its turn asked a blessing of father, mother, grandmother, uncle, aunt, and not omitting the stranger within the gates, even the Niño Diablo of evil-sounding name.

The men drew forth their pouches, and began making

their cigarettes, when once more the children gathered round the story-teller, their faces glowing with expectation.

"No, no," cried their mother. "No more stories to-night—to bed, to bed!"

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried Rosita pleadingly, and struggling to free herself; for the good woman had dashed in among them to enforce obedience. "Oh, let me stay till the story ends! The reed-cat has said such things! Oh, what will they do with the poor little girl?"

"And oh, mother mine!" drowsily sobbed her little sister; "the armadillo that said—that said nothing because it had nothing to say, and the partridge that whistled and said—" and here she broke into a prolonged wail. The boys also added their voices until the hubbub was no longer to be borne, and Gregory rose up in his wrath and called on some one to lend him a big whip; only then they yielded, and still sobbing and casting many a lingering look behind, were led from the kitchen.

During this scene the Niño had been carrying on a whispered conversation with the pretty Magdalen of his choice, heedless of the uproar of which he had been the indirect cause; deaf also to the bitter remarks of Ascension concerning some people who, having no homes of their own, were fond of coming uninvited into other people's houses, only to repay the hospitality extended to them by stealing their silly daughters' affections, and teaching their children to rebel against their authority.

But the noise and confusion had served to arouse Polycarp from a drowsy fit; for like a boa constrictor, he had dined largely after his long fast, and dinner had made him

dull; bending towards his cousin he whispered earnestly: "Who is this young stranger, Gregory?"

"In what corner of the earth have you been hiding to ask who the Niño Diablo is?" returned the other.

"Must I know the history of every cat and dog?"

"The Niño is not cat nor dog, cousin, but a man among men, like a falcon among birds. When a child of six the Indians killed all his relations and carried him into captivity. After five years he escaped out of their hands, and, guided by sun and stars and signs on the earth, he found his way back to the Christians' country, bringing many beautiful horses stolen from his captors; also the name of Niño Diablo first given to him by the infidel. We know him by no other."

"This is a good story; in truth I like it well—it pleases me mightily," said Polycarp. "And what more, cousin Gregory?"

"More than I can tell, cousin. When he comes the dogs bark not—who knows why? His tread is softer than the cat's; the untamed horse is tame for him. Always in the midst of dangers, yet no harm, no scratch. Why? Because he stoops like the falcon, makes his stroke and is gone—Heaven knows where!"

"What strange things are you telling me? Wonderful! And what more, cousin Gregory?"

"He often goes into the Indian country, and lives freely with the infidel, disguised, for they do not know him who was once their captive. They speak of the Niño Diablo to him, saying that when they catch that thief they will flay him alive. He listens to their strange stories, then

leaves them, taking their finest ponchos and silver ornaments, and the flower of their horses."

"A brave youth, one after my own heart, cousin Gregory. Heaven defend and prosper him in all his journeys into the Indian territory! Before we part I shall embrace him and offer him my friendship, which is worth something. More, tell me more, cousin Gregory?"

"These things I tell you to put you on your guard; look well to your horses, cousin."

"What!" shouted the other, lifting himself up from his stooping posture, and staring at his relation with astonishment and kindling anger in his countenance.

The conversation had been carried on in a low tone, and the sudden loud exclamation startled them all—all except the Niño, who continued smoking and chatting pleasantly to the twins.

"Lightning and pestilence, what is this you say to me, Gregory Gorostiaga!" continued Polycarp, violently slapping his thigh and thrusting his hat farther back on his head.

"Prudence!" whispered Gregory. "Say nothing to offend the Niño; he never forgives an enemy—with horses."

"Talk not to me of prudence!" bawled the other. You hit me on the apple of the eye and counsel me not to cry out. What! have not I, whom men call Polycarp of the South, wrestled with tigers in the desert, and must I hold my peace because of a boy—even a boy devil? Talk of what you like, cousin, and I am a meek man—meek as a sucking babe; but touch not on my horses, for then I am

a whirlwind, a conflagration, a river flooded in winter, and all wrath and destruction like an invasion of Indians! Who can stand before me? Ribs of steel are no protection! Look at my knife; do you ask why there are stains on the blade? Listen; because it has gone straight to the robber's heart!" And with that he drew out his great knife and flourished it wildly, and made stabs and slashes at an imaginary foe suspended above the fire.

The pretty girls grew silent and pale and trembled like poplar leaves; the old grandmother rose up, and clutching at her shawl toddled hurriedly away, while Ascension uttered a snort of disdain. But the Niño still talked and smiled, blowing thin smoke-clouds from his lips, careless of the tempest of wrath gathering before him; till, seeing the other so calm, the man of war returned his weapon to its sheath, and glancing round and lowering his voice to a conversational tone, informed his hearers that his name was Polycarp, one known and feared by all men,—especially in the south; that he was disposed to live in peace and amity with the entire human race, and he therefore considered it unreasonable of some men to follow him about the world asking him to kill them. "Perhaps," he concluded, with a touch of irony, "they think I gain something by putting them to death. A mistake, good friends; I gain nothing by it! I am not a vulture, and their dead bodies can be of no use to me."

Just after this sanguinary protest and disclaimer the Niño all at once made a gesture as if to impose silence, and turning his face towards the door, his nostrils dilating, and his eyes appearing to grow large and luminous like those of a cat.

"What do you hear, Niño?" asked Gregory.

"I hear lapwings screaming," he replied.

"Only at a fox perhaps," said the other. "But go to the door, Niño, and listen."

"No need," he returned, dropping his hand, the light of a sudden excitement passing from his face. "'Tis only a single horseman riding this way at a fast gallop."

Polycarp got up and went to the door, saying that when a man was among robbers it behoved him to look well after his cattle. Then he came back and sat down again. "Perhaps," he remarked, with a side glance at the Niño, "a better plan would be to watch the thief. A lie, cousin Gregory; no lapwings are screaming; no single horseman approaching at a fast gallop. The night is serene, and earth as silent as the sepulchre."

"Prudence!" whispered Gregory again. "Ah, cousin, always playful like a kitten; when will you grow old and wise? Can you not see a sleeping snake without turning aside to stir it up with your naked foot?"

Strange to say, Polycarp made no reply. A long experience in getting up quarrels had taught him that these impassive men were, in truth, often enough like venomous snakes, quick and deadly when roused. He became secret and watchful in his manner.

All now were intently listening. Then said Gregory, "Tell us, Niño, what voices, fine as the trumpet of the smallest fly, do you hear coming from that great silence? Has the mother skunk put her little ones to sleep in their kennel and gone out to seek for the pipit's nest? Have fox and armadillo met to challenge each other to fresh

trials of strength and cunning? What is the owl saying this moment to his mistress in praise of her big, green eyes?"

The young man smiled slightly, but answered not; and for full five minutes more all listened, then sounds of approaching hoofs became audible. Dogs began to bark, horses to snort in alarm, and Gregory rose and went forth to receive the late night-wanderer. Soon he appeared, beating the angry barking dogs off with his whip, a white-faced, wild-haired man, furiously spurring his horse like a person demented or flying from robbers.

"*Ave Maria!*" he shouted aloud; and when the answer was given in suitable pious words, the scared-looking stranger drew near and bending down said, "Tell me, good friend, is one whom men call Niño Diablo with you; for to this house I have been directed in my search for him?"

"He is within, friend," answered Gregory. "Follow me and you shall see him with your own eyes. Only first unsaddle, so that your horse may roll before the sweat dries on him."

"How many horses have I ridden their last journey on this quest!" said the stranger, hurriedly pulling off the saddle and rugs. "But tell me one thing more; is he well —no indisposition? Has he met with no accident—a broken bone, a sprained ankle?"

"Friend," said Gregory, "I have heard that once in past times the moon met with an accident, but of the Niño no such thing has been reported to me."

With this assurance the stranger followed his host

into the kitchen, made his salutation, and sat down by the fire. He was about thirty years old, a good-looking man, but his face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot, his manner restless, and he appeared like one half-crazed by some great calamity. The hospitable Magdalen placed food before him and pressed him to eat. He complied, although reluctantly, despatched his supper in a few moments, and murmured a prayer; then, glancing curiously at the two men seated near him, he addressed himself to the burly, well-armed, and dangerous-looking Polycarp. "Friend," he said, his agitation increasing as he spoke, "four days have I been seeking you, taking neither food nor rest, so great was my need of your assistance. You alone, after God, can help me. Help me in this strait, and half of all I possess in land and cattle and gold shall be freely given to you, and the angels above will applaud your deed!"

"Drunk or mad?" was the reply vouchsafed to this appeal.

"Sir," said the stranger with dignity, "I have not tasted wine these many days, nor has my great grief crazed me."

"Then what ails the man?" said Polycarp. "Fear perhaps, for he is white in the face like one who has seen the Indians."

"In truth I have seen them. I was one of those unfortunates who first opposed them, and most of the friends who were with me are now food for wild dogs. Where our houses stood there are only ashes and a stain of blood on the ground. "Oh friend, can you not guess why you alone were in my thought when this trouble

came to me—why I have ridden day and night to find you?"

"Demons!" exclaimed Polycarp, "into what quagmires would this man lead me? Once for all I understand you not! Leave me in peace, strange man, or we shall quarrel." And here he tapped his weapon significantly.

At this juncture, Gregory, who took his time about everything, thought proper to interpose. "You are mistaken, friend," said he. "The young man sitting on your right is the Niño Diablo, for whom you inquired a little while ago."

A look of astonishment, followed by one of intense relief, came over the stranger's face. Turning to the young man he said, "My friend, forgive me this mistake. Grief has perhaps dimmed my sight; but sometimes the iron blade and the blade of finest temper are not easily distinguished by the eye. When we try them we know which is the brute metal, and cast it aside to take up the other, and trust our life to it. The words I have spoken were meant for you, and you have heard them."

"What can I do for you, friend?" said the Niño.

"Oh, sir, the greatest service! You can restore my lost wife to me. The savages have taken her away into captivity. What can I do to save her—I who cannot make myself invisible, and fly like the wind, and compass all things!" And here he bowed his head, and covering his face gave way to over-mastering grief.

"Be comforted, friend," said the other, touching him lightly on the arm. "I will restore her to you."

"Oh, friend, how shall I thank you for these words!"

cried the unhappy man, seizing and pressing the Niño's hand.

"Tell me her name—describe her to me."

"Torcuata is her name—Torcuata de la Rosa. She is one finger's width taller than this young woman," indicating one of the twins who was standing. "But not dark; her cheeks are rosy—no, no, I forget, they will be pale now, whiter than the grass plumes, with stains of dark colour under the eyes. Brown hair and blue eyes, but very deep blue. Look well, friend, lest you think them black and leave her to perish."

"Never!" remarked Gregory, shaking his head.

"Enough—you have told me enough, friend," said the Niño, rolling up a cigarette.

"Enough!" repeated the other, surprised. "But you do not know; she is my life; my life is in your hands. How can I persuade you to be with me. Cattle I have. I had gone to pay the herdsmen their wages when the Indians came unexpectedly; and my house at La Chilca on the banks of the Langueyú, was burnt, and my wife taken away during my absence. Eight hundred head of cattle have escaped the savages, and half of them shall be yours; and half of all I possess in money and land."

"Cattle!" returned the Niño, smiling, and holding a lighted stick to his cigarette. "I have enough to eat without molesting myself with the care of cattle."

"But I told you that I had other things," said the stranger, full of distress.

The young man laughed, and rose from his seat.

"Listen to me," he said. "I go now to follow the

Indians—to mix with them, perhaps. They are retreating slowly, burdened with much spoil. In fifteen days go to the little town of Tandil, and wait for me there. As for land, if God has given so much of it to the ostrich it is not a thing for a man to set a great value on." Then he bent down to whisper a few words in the ear of the girl at his side; and immediately afterwards, with a simple "good-night" to the others, stepped lightly from the kitchen. By another door the girl also hurriedly left the room, to hide her tears from the watchful censuring eyes of mother and aunt.

Then the stranger, recovering from his astonishment at the abrupt ending of the conversation, started up, and crying aloud, "Stay! stay one moment—one word more!" rushed out after the young man. At some distance from the house he caught sight of the Niño, sitting motionless on his horse, as if waiting to speak to him.

"This is what I have to say to you," spoke the Niño, bending down to the other. "Go back to Langueyú, and rebuild your house, and expect me there with your wife in about thirty days. When I bade you go to the Tandil in fifteen days, I spoke only to mislead that man Polycarp, who has an evil mind. Can I ride a hundred leagues and back in fifteen days? Say no word of this to any man. And fear not. If I fail to return with your wife at the appointed time take some of that money you have offered me, and bid a priest say a mass for my soul's repose; for eye of man shall never see me again, and the brown hawks will be complaining that there is no more flesh to be picked from my bones."

During this brief colloquy, and afterwards, when Gregory and his women-folk went off to bed, leaving the stranger to sleep in his rugs beside the kitchen fire, Polycarp, who had sworn a mighty oath not to close his eyes that night, busied himself making his horses secure. Driving them home, he tied them to the posts of the gate within twenty-five yards of the kitchen door. Then he sat down by the fire and smoked and dozed, and cursed his dry mouth and drowsy eyes that were so hard to keep open. At intervals of about fifteen minutes he would get up and go out to satisfy himself that his precious horses were still safe. At length in rising, some time after midnight, his foot kicked against some loud-sounding metal object lying beside him on the floor, which on examination proved to be a copper bell of a peculiar shape, and curiously like the one fastened to the neck of his bell-mare. Bell in hand, he stepped to the door and put out his head, and lo! his horses were no longer at the gate! Eight horses: seven iron-grey geldings, every one of them swift and sure-footed, sound as the bell in his hand, and as like each other as seven claret-coloured eggs in the tinamou's nest; and the eighth the gentle piebald mare—the *madrina* his horses loved and would follow to the world's end, now, alas! with a thief on her back! Gone—gone!

He rushed out, uttering a succession of frantic howls and imprecations; and finally, to wind up the performance, dashed the now useless bell with all his energy against the gate, shattering it into a hundred pieces. Oh, that bell, how often and how often in how many a

wayside public-house had he boasted, in his cups and when sober, of its mellow, far-reaching tone,—the sweet sound that assured him in the silent watches of the night that his beloved steeds were safe! Now he danced on the broken fragments, digging them into the earth with his heel; now in his frenzy, he could have dug them up again to grind them to powder with his teeth!

The children turned restlessly in bed, dreaming of the lost little girl in the desert; and the stranger half awoke, muttering, "Courage, O Torcuata—let not your heart break. . . . Soul of my life, he gives you back to me—on my bosom, *rosa fresca, rosa fresca!*" Then the hands unclenched themselves again, and the muttering died away. But Gregory woke fully, and instantly divined the cause of the clamour. "Magdalen! Wife!" he said. "Listen to Polycarp; the Niño has paid him out for his insolence! Oh, fool, I warned him, and he would not listen!" But Magdalen refused to wake; and so, hiding his head under the coverlet, he made the bed shake with suppressed laughter, so pleased was he at the clever trick played on his blustering cousin. All at once his laughter ceased, and out popped his head again, showing in the dim light a somewhat long and solemn face. For he had suddenly thought of his pretty daughter asleep in the adjoining room. Asleep! Wide awake, more likely, thinking of her sweet lover, brushing the dew from the hoary pampas grass in his southward flight, speeding away into the heart of the vast mysterious wilderness. Listening also to her uncle, the desperado, apostrophizing the midnight stars; while with his knife he excavates

two deep trenches, three yards long and intersecting each other at right angles—a sacred symbol on which he intends, when finished, to swear a most horrible vengeance. "Perhaps," muttered Gregory, "the Niño has still other pranks to play in this house."

When the stranger heard next morning what had happened, he was better able to understand the Niño's motive in giving him that caution overnight; nor was he greatly put out, but thought it better that an evil-minded man should lose his horses than that the Niño should set out badly mounted on such an adventure.

"Let me not forget," said the robbed man, as he rode away on a horse borrowed from his cousin, "to be at the Tandil this day fortnight, with a sharp knife and a blunderbuss charged with a handful of powder and not fewer than twenty-three slugs."

Terribly in earnest was Polycarp of the South! He was there at the appointed time, slugs and all; but the smooth-cheeked, mysterious, child-devil came not; nor, stranger still, did the scared-looking de la Rosa come clattering in to look for his lost Torcuata. At the end of the fifteenth day de la Rosa was at Langueyú, seventy-five miles from the Tandil, alone in his new rancho, which had just been rebuilt with the aid of a few neighbours. Through all that night he sat alone by the fire, pondering many things. If he could only recover his lost wife, then he would bid a long farewell to that wild frontier and take her across the great sea, and to that old tree-shaded stone farm-house in Andalusia, which he had left a boy, and where his aged parents still lived, thinking no more to

see their wandering son. His resolution was taken; he would sell all he possessed, all except a portion of land in the Langueyú with the house he had just rebuilt; and to the Niño Diablo, the deliverer, he would say, "Friend, though you despise the things that others value, take this land and poor house for the sake of the girl Magdalen you love; for then perhaps her parents will no longer deny her to you."

He was still thinking of these things, when a dozen or twenty military starlings—that cheerful scarlet-breasted songster of the lonely pampas—alighted on the thatch outside, and warbling their gay, careless winter-music told him that it was day. And all day long, on foot and on horseback, his thoughts were of his lost Torcuata; and when evening once more drew near his heart was sick with suspense and longing; and climbing the ladder placed against the gable of his rancho he stood on the roof gazing westwards into the blue distance. The sun, crimson and large, sunk into the great green sea of grass, and from all the plain rose the tender fluting notes of the tinamou-partridges, bird answering bird. "Oh, that I could pierce the haze with my vision," he murmured, "that I could see across a hundred leagues of level plain, and look this moment on your sweet face, Torcuata!"

And Torcuata was in truth a hundred leagues distant from him at that moment; and if the miraculous sight he wished for had been given, this was what he would have seen. A wide, barren plain scantily clothed with yellow tufts of grass and thorny shrubs, and at its southern

extremity, shutting out the view on that side, a low range of dune-like hills. Over this level ground, towards the range, moves a vast herd of cattle and horses—fifteen or twenty thousand head—followed by a scattered horde of savages armed with their long lances. In a small compact body in the centre ride the captives, women and children. Just as the red orb touches the horizon the hills are passed, and lo! a wide, grassy valley beyond, with flocks and herds pasturing, and scattered trees, and the blue gleam of water from a chain of small lakes! There full in sight is the Indian settlement, the smoke rising peacefully up from the clustered huts. At the sight of home the savages burst into loud cries of joy and triumph, answered, as they drew near, with piercing screams of welcome from the village population, chiefly composed of women, children and old men.

It is past midnight; the young moon has set; the last fires are dying down; the shouts and loud noise of excited talk and laughter have ceased, and the weary warriors, after feasting on sweet mare's flesh to repletion, have fallen asleep in their huts, or lying out of doors on the ground. Only the dogs are excited still and keep up an incessant barking. Even the captive women, huddled together in one hut in the middle of the settlement, fatigued with their long rough journey, have cried themselves to sleep at last.

At length one of the sad sleepers wakes, or half wakes, dreaming that someone has called her name. How could such a thing be? Yet her own name still seems ringing

in her brain, and at length, fully awake, she finds herself intently listening. Again it sounded—"Torcuata"—a voice fine as the pipe of a mosquito, yet so sharp and distinct that it tingled in her ear. She sat up and listened again, and once more it sounded "Torcuata!" "Who speaks?" she returned in a fearful whisper. The voice, still fine and small, replied, "Come out from among the others until you touch the wall." Trembling she obeyed, creeping out from among the sleepers until she came into contact with the side of the hut. Then the voice sounded again, "Creep round the wall until you come to a small crack of light on the other side." Again she obeyed, and when she reached the line of faint light it widened quickly to an aperture, through which a shadowy arm was passed round her waist; and in a moment she was lifted up, and saw the stars above her, and at her feet dark forms of men wrapped in their ponchos lying asleep. But no one woke, no alarm was given; and in a very few minutes she was mounted, man-fashion, on a bare-backed horse, speeding swiftly over the dim plains, with the shadowy form of her mysterious deliverer some yards in advance, driving before him a score or so of horses. He had only spoken half-a-dozen words to her since their escape from the hut, but she knew by those words that he was taking her to Langueyú.

MARTA RIQUELME

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(*From the Sepulvida MSS.*)

CHAPTER I

FAR away from the paths of those who wander to and fro on the earth, sleeps Jujuy in the heart of this continent. It is the remotest of our provinces, and divided from the countries of the Pacific by the giant range of the Cordillera; a region of mountains and forest, torrid heats and great storms; and although in itself a country half as large as the Spanish peninsula, it possesses, as its only means of communication with the outside world, a few insignificant roads which are scarcely more than mule-paths.

The people of this region have few wants; they aspire not after progress, and have never changed their ancient manner of life. The Spanish were long in conquering them; and now, after three centuries of Christian dominion, they still speak the Quichua, and subsist in a great measure on patay, a sweet paste made from the pod of the wild algarroba tree; while they still retain as a beast of burden the llama, a gift of their old masters the Peruvian Incas.

This much is common knowledge, but of the peculiar character of the country, or of the nature of the things

which happen within its borders, nothing is known to those without; Jujuy being to them only a country lying over against the Andes, far removed from and unaffected by the progress of the world. It has pleased Providence to give me a more intimate knowledge, and this has been a sore affliction and great burden now for many years. But I have not taken up my pen to complain that all the years of my life are consumed in a region where the great spiritual enemy of mankind is still permitted to challenge the supremacy of our Master, waging an equal war against his followers: my sole object is to warn, perhaps also to comfort, others who will be my successors in this place and who will come to the church of Yala ignorant of the means which will be used for the destruction of their souls. And if I set down anything in this narrative which might be injurious to our holy religion, owing to the darkness of our understanding and the little faith that is in us, I pray that the sin I now ignorantly commit may be forgiven me, and that this manuscript may perish miraculously unread by any person.

I was educated for the priesthood in the city of Cordova, that famous seminary of learning and religion; and in 1838, being then in my twenty-seventh year, I was appointed priest to a small settlement in the distant province of which I have spoken. The habit of obedience, early instilled in me by my Jesuit masters, enabled me to accept this command unmurmuringly, and even with an outward show of cheerfulness. Nevertheless it filled me with grief, although I might have suspected that some such hard fate had been designed for me, since I had been

made to study the Quichua language, which is now only spoken in the Andean provinces. With secret bitter repinings I tore myself from all that made life pleasant and desirable—the society of innumerable friends, the libraries, the beautiful church where I had worshipped, and that renowned University which has shed on the troubled annals of our unhappy country whatever lustre of learning and poetry they possess.

My first impressions of Jujuy did not serve to raise my spirits. After a trying journey of four weeks' duration—the roads being difficult and the country greatly disturbed at the time—I reached the capital of the province, also called Jujuy, a town of about two thousand inhabitants. Thence I journeyed to my destination, a settlement called Yala, situated on the north-western border of the province, where the river Yala takes its rise, at the foot of that range of mountains which, branching eastwards from the Andes, divides Jujuy from Bolivia. I was wholly unprepared for the character of the place I had come to live in. Yala was a scattered village of about ninety souls—ignorant, apathetic people, chiefly Indians. To my unaccustomed sight the country appeared a rude, desolate chaos of rocks and gigantic mountains, compared with which the famous sierras of Cordova sunk into mere hillocks, and of vast gloomy forests, whose death-like stillness was broken only by the savage screams of some strange fowl, or by the hoarse thunders of a distant waterfall.

As soon as I had made myself known to the people of the village, I set myself to acquire a knowledge of the

surrounding country; but before long I began to despair of ever finding the limits of my parish in any direction. The country was wild, being only tenanted by a few widely-separated families, and like all deserts it was distasteful to me in an eminent degree; but as I would frequently be called upon to perform long journeys, I resolved to learn as much as possible of its geography. Always striving to overcome my own inclinations, which made a studious, sedentary life most congenial, I aimed at being very active; and having procured a good mule I began taking long rides every day, without a guide and with only a pocket compass to prevent me from losing myself. I could never altogether overcome my natural aversion to silent deserts, and in my long rides I avoided the thick forest and deep valleys, keeping as much as possible to the open plain.

One day having ridden about twelve or fourteen miles from Yala, I discovered a tree of noble proportions growing by itself in the open, and feeling much oppressed by the heat I alighted from my mule and stretched myself on the ground under the grateful shade. There was a continuous murmur of lecheguanas—a small honey wasp—in the foliage above me, for the tree was in flower, and this soothing sound soon brought that restful feeling to my mind which insensibly leads to slumber. I was, however, still far from sleep, but reclining with eyes half closed, thinking of nothing, when suddenly, from the depths of the dense leafage above me, rang forth a shriek, the most terrible it has ever fallen to the lot of any human being to hear. In sound it was a human cry, yet expressing a

degree of agony and despair surpassing the power of any human soul to feel, and my impression was that it could only have been uttered by some tortured spirit allowed to wander for a season on the earth. Shriek after shriek, each more powerful and terrible to hear than the last, succeeded, and I sprang to my feet, the hair standing erect on my head, a profuse sweat of terror breaking out all over me. The cause of all these maddening sounds remained invisible to my eyes; and finally running to my mule, I climbed hastily on to its back and never ceased flogging the poor beast all the way back to Yala.

On reaching my house I sent for one Osuna, a man of substance, able to converse in Spanish, and much respected in the village. In the evening he came to see me, and I then gave an account of the extraordinary experience I had encountered that day.

"Do not distress yourself, Father—you have only heard the Kakué," he replied. I then learnt from him that the Kakué is a fowl frequenting the most gloomy and sequestered forests and known to everyone in the country for its terrible voice. Kakué, he also informed me, was the ancient name of the country, but the word was misspelt Jujuy by the early explorers, and this corrupted name was eventually retained. All this, which I now heard for the first time, is historical; but when he proceeded to inform me that the Kakué is a metamorphosed human being, that women and sometimes men, whose lives have been darkened with great suffering and calamities, are changed by compassionate spirits into the lugubrious

birds, I asked him somewhat contemptuously whether he, an enlightened man, believed a thing so absurd.

"There is not in all Jujuy," he replied, "a person who disbelieves it."

"That is a mere assertion," cried I, "but it shows which way your mind inclines. No doubt the superstition concerning the Kakué is very ancient, and has come down to us together with the Quichua language from the aborigines. Transformations of men into animals are common in all the primitive religions of South America. Thus, the Guarines relate that flying from a conflagration caused by the descent of the sun to the earth many people cast themselves into the river Paraguay, and were incontinently changed into capybaras and caymans; while others who took refuge in trees were blackened and scorched by the heat and became monkeys. But to go no further than the traditions of the Incas who once ruled over this region, it is related that after the first creation the entire human family, inhabiting the slopes of the Andes, were changed into crickets by a demon at enmity with man's first creator. Throughout the continent these ancient beliefs are at present either dead or dying out; and if the Kakué legend still maintains its hold on the vulgar here it is owing to the isolated position of the country, hemmed in by vast mountains and having no intercourse with neighbouring states."

Perceiving that my arguments had entirely failed to produce any effect I began to lose my temper, and demanded whether he, a Christian, dared to profess belief in a fable born of the corrupt imagination of the heathen?

He shrugged his shoulders and replied, "I have only stated what we, in Jujuy, know to be a fact. What is, is; and if you talk until to-morrow you cannot make it different, although you may prove yourself a very learned person."

His answer produced a strange effect on me. For the first time in my life I experienced the sensation of anger in all its power. Rising to my feet I paced the floor excitedly, and using many gestures, smiting the table with my hands and shaking my clenched fist close to his face in a threatening manner, and with a violence of language unbecoming to a follower of Christ, I denounced the degrading ignorance and heathenish condition of mind of the people I had come to live with; and more particularly of the person before me, who had some pretensions to education and should have been free from the gross delusions of the vulgar. While addressing him in this tone he sat smoking a cigarette, blowing rings from his lips, and placidly watching them rise towards the ceiling, and with his studied supercilious indifference aggravated my rage to such a degree that I could scarcely restrain myself from flying at his throat or striking him to the earth with one of the cane-bottomed chairs in the room.

As soon as he left me, however, I was overwhelmed with remorse at having behaved in a manner so unseemly. I spent the night in penitent tears and prayer, and resolved in future to keep a strict watch over myself, now that the secret enemy of my soul had revealed itself to me. Nor did I make this resolution a moment too soon. I had hitherto

regarded myself as a person of a somewhat mild and placid disposition; the sudden change to new influences, and, perhaps also, the secret disgust I felt at my lot, had quickly developed my true character, which now became impatient to a degree and prone to sudden violent outbursts of passion during which I had little control over my tongue. The perpetual watch over myself and struggle against my evil nature which had now become necessary was the cause of but half my trouble. I discovered that my parishioners, with scarcely an exception, possessed that dull apathetic temper of mind concerning spiritual things, which has so greatly exasperated me in the man Osuna, and which obstructed all my efforts to benefit them. These people, or rather their ancestors centuries ago, had accepted Christianity, but it had never properly filtered down into their hearts. It was on the surface still; and if their half-heathen minds were deeply stirred it was not by the story of the Passion of our Lord, but by some superstitious belief inherited from their progenitors. During all the years I have spent in Yala I never said a Mass, never preached a sermon, never attempted to speak of the consolations of faith, without having the thought thrust on to me that my words were useless, that I was watering the rock where no seed could germinate, and wasting my life in vain efforts to impart religion to souls that were proof against it. Often have I been reminded of our holy and learned Father Guevara's words, when he complains of the difficulties encountered by the earlier Jesuit missionaries. He relates how one endeavoured to impress the Chiriguanos with the danger they incurred by

refusing baptism, picturing to them their future condition when they would be condemned to everlasting fire. To which they only replied that they were not disturbed by what he told them, but were, on the contrary, greatly pleased to hear that the flames of the future would be unquenchable, for that would save them infinite trouble, and if they found the fire too hot they would remove themselves to a proper distance from it. So hard it was for their heathen intellects to comprehend the solemn doctrines of our faith!

CHAPTER II

MY knowledge of the Quichua language, acquired solely by the study of the vocabularies, was at first of little advantage to me. I found myself unable to converse on familiar topics with the people of Yala; and this was a great difficulty in my way, and a cause of distress for more reasons than one. I was unprovided with books, or other means of profit and recreation, and therefore eagerly sought out the few people in the place able to converse in Spanish, for I have always been fond of social intercourse. There were only four: one very old man, who died shortly after my arrival; another was Osuna, a man for whom I had conceived an unconquerable aversion; the other two were women, the widow Riquelme and her daughter. About this girl I must speak at some length, since it is with her fortunes that this narrative is chiefly concerned. The widow Riquelme was poor, having only a house in Yala, but with a garden sufficiently large to grow a plentiful provision of fruit and vegetables, and to feed a few goats, so that these women had enough to live on, without ostentation, from their plot of ground. They were of pure Spanish blood; the mother was prematurely old and faded; Marta, who was a little over fifteen when I arrived at Yala, was the loveliest being I had ever beheld; though in this matter my opinion may

be biased, for I only saw her side by side with the dark-skinned coarse-haired Indian women, and compared with their faces of ignoble type Marta's was like that of an angel. Her features were regular; her skin white, but with that pale darkness in it seen in some whose families have lived for generations in tropical countries. Her eyes, shaded by long lashes, were of that violet tint seen sometimes in people of Spanish blood—eyes which appear black until looked at closely. Her hair was however the crown of her beauty and chief glory, for it was of great length and a dark shining gold colour—a thing wonderful to see!

The society of these two women, who were full of sympathy and sweetness, promised to be a great boon to me, and I was often with them; but very soon I discovered that, on the contrary, it was only about to add a fresh bitterness to my existence. The Christian affection I felt for this beautiful child insensibly degenerated into a mundane passion of such overmastering strength that all my efforts to pluck it out of my heart proved ineffectual. I cannot describe my unhappy condition during the long months when I vainly wrestled with this sinful emotion, and when I often thought in the bitterness of my heart that my God had forsaken me. The fear that the time would come when my feelings would betray themselves increased on me until at length, to avoid so great an evil, I was compelled to cease visiting the only house in Yala where it was a pleasure for me to enter. What had I done to be thus cruelly persecuted by Satan? was the constant cry of my soul. Now I know that this temptation was

only a part of that long and desperate struggle in which the servants of the prince of the power of the air had engaged to overthrow me.

Not for five years did this conflict with myself cease to be a constant danger—a period which seemed to my mind not less than half a century. Nevertheless, knowing that idleness is the parent of evil, I was incessantly occupied; for when there was nothing to call me abroad, I laboured with my pen at home, filling in this way many volumes, which in the end may serve to throw some light on the great historical question of the Incas' Cis-Andine dominion, and its effect on the conquered nations.

When Marta was twenty years old it became known in Yala that she had promised her hand in marriage to one Cosme Luna, and of this person a few words must be said. Like many young men, possessing no property or occupation, and having no disposition to work, he was a confirmed gambler, spending all his time going about from town to town to attend horse-races and cock-fights. I had for a long time regarded him as an abominable pest in Yala, a wretch possessing a hundred vices under a pleasing exterior, and not one redeeming virtue, and it was therefore with the deepest pain that I heard of his success with Marta. The widow, who was naturally disappointed at her daughter's choice, came to me with tears and complaints begging me to assist her in persuading her beloved child to break off an engagement which promised only to make her unhappy for life. But with that secret feeling in my heart, ever-striving to drag me down to my ruin, I dared not help her, albeit, I would gladly have given my

right hand to save Marta from the calamity of marrying such a man.

The tempest which these tidings had raised in my heart never abated while the preparations for the marriage were going on. I was forced now to abandon my work, for I was incapable of thought; nor did all my religious exercises avail to banish for one moment the strange, sullen rage which had taken complete possession of me. Night after night I would rise from my bed and pace the floor of my room for hours, vainly trying to shut out the promptings of some fiend perpetually urging me to take some desperate course against this young man. A thousand schemes for his destruction suggested themselves to my mind, and when I had resolutely dismissed them all and prayed that my sinful temper might be forgiven, I would rise from my knees still cursing him a thousand times more than ever.

In the meantime, Marta herself saw nothing wrong in Cosme, for love had blinded her. He was young, good looking, could play on the guitar and sing, and was master of that easy, playful tone in conversation which is always pleasing to women. Moreover, he dressed well and was generous with his money, with which he was apparently well provided.

In due time they were married, and Cosme, having no house of his own, came to live with his mother-in-law in Yala. Then, at length, what I had foreseen also happened. He ran out of money, and his new relations had nothing he could lay his hands on to sell. He was too proud to gamble for coppers, and the poor people of Yala

had no silver to risk ; he could not or would not work, an the vacant life he was living began to grow wearisom Once more he took to his old courses, and it soon grew t be a common thing for him to be absent from home for month or six weeks at a time. Marta looked unhappy but would not complain or listen to a word agains Cosme ; for whenever he returned to Yala then his wife' great beauty was like a new thing to him, bringing him t her feet, and making him again for a brief season he devoted lover and slave.

She at length became a mother. For her sake I wa glad ; for now with her infant boy to occupy her mind Cosme's neglect would seem more endurable. He wa away when the child was born ; he had gone, it wa reported, into Catamarca, and for three months nothing was heard of him. This was a season of political troubles and men being required to recruit the forces, all persons found wandering about the country not engaged in any lawful occupation, were taken for military service. And this had happened to Cosme. A letter from him reached Marta at last, informing her that he had been carried away to San Luis, and asking her to send him two hundred pesos, as with that amount he would be able to purchase his release. But it was impossible for her to raise the money : nor could she leave Yala to go to him, for her mother's strength was now rapidly failing, and Marta could not abandon her to the care of strangers. All this she was obliged to tell Cosme in the letter she wrote to him, and which perhaps never reached his hands, for no reply to it ever came.

At length, the widow Riquelme died; then Marta sold the house and garden and all she possessed, and taking her child with her, went out to seek her husband. Travelling first to the town of Jujuy, she there, with other women, attached herself to a convoy about to start on a journey to the southern provinces. Several months went by, and then came the disastrous tidings to Yala that the convoy had been surprised by Indians in a lonely place and all the people slain.

I will not here dwell on the anguish of mind I endured on learning Marta's sad end; for I tried hard to believe that her troubled life was indeed over, although I was often assured by my neighbours that the Indians invariably spare the women and children.

Every blow dealt by a cruel destiny against this most unhappy woman had pierced my heart; and during the years that followed, and when the villagers had long ceased to speak of her, often in the dead of the night I rose and sought the house where she had lived, and walking under the trees in the garden where I had so often held intercourse with her, indulged a grief which time seemed powerless to mitigate.

CHAPTER III

MARTA was not dead; but what happened to her after her departure from Yala was this: When the convoy with which she journeyed was attacked the men only were slain, while the women and children were carried away into captivity. When the victors divided the spoil among themselves, the child, which even in that long painful journey into the desert, with the prospect of a life of cruel slavery before her, had been a comfort to Marta, was taken forcibly from her arms to be conveyed to some distant place, and from that moment she utterly lost sight of it. She was herself bought by an Indian able to pay for a pretty white captive, and who presently made her his wife. She, a Christian, the wife of a man loved only too well, could not endure this horrible fate which had overtaken her. She was also mad with grief at the loss of her child, and stealing out one dark stormy night she fled from the Indian settlement. For several days and nights she wandered about the desert, suffering every hardship and in constant fear of jaguars, and was at length found by the savages in a half-starved condition and unable longer to fly from them. Her owner, when she was restored to him, had no mercy on her: he bound her to a tree growing beside his hovel, and there every day he cruelly scourged her naked flesh to satisfy his

barbarous resentment, until she was ready to perish with excessive suffering. He also cut off her hair, and braiding it into a belt wore it always round his waist,—a golden trophy which doubtless won him great honour and distinction amongst his fellow savages. When he had by these means utterly broken her spirit and reduced her to the last condition of weakness, he released her from the tree, but at the same time fastened a log of wood to her ankle, so that only with great labour and drawing herself along with the aid of her hands, could she perform the daily tasks her master imposed on her. Only after a whole year of captivity, and when she had given birth to a child, was the punishment over and her foot released from the log. The natural affection which she felt for this child of a father so cruel was now poor Marta's only comfort. In this hard servitude five years of her miserable existence were consumed; and only those who know the stern, sullen, pitiless character of the Indian can imagine what this period was for Marta, without sympathy from her fellow-creatures, with no hope and no pleasure beyond the pleasure of loving and caressing her own infant savages. Of these she was now the mother of three.

When her youngest was not many months old Marta had one day wandered some distance in search of sticks for firewood, when a woman, one of her fellow-captives from Jujuy, came running to her, for she had been watching for an opportunity of speaking with Marta. It happened that this woman had succeeded in persuading her Indian husband to take her back to her home in the

Christian country, and she had at the same time won his consent to take Marta with them, having conceived a great affection for her. The prospect of escape filled poor Marta's heart with joy, but when she was told that her children could on no account be taken, then a cruel struggle commenced in her breast. Bitterly she pleaded for permission to take her babes, and at last overcome by her importunity her fellow-captive consented to her taking the youngest of the three; though this concession was made very reluctantly.

In a short time the day appointed for the flight arrived and Marta carrying her infant met her friends in the wood. They were quickly mounted, and the journey began which was to last for many days, and during which they were to suffer much from hunger, thirst and fatigue. One dark night as they journeyed through a hilly and wooded country, Marta being overcome with fatigue so that she could scarcely keep her seat, the Indian, with affected kindness, relieved her of the child she always carried in her arms. An hour passed, and then pressing forward to his side and asking for her child she was told that it had been dropped into a deep, swift stream over which they had swam their horses some time before. Of what happened after that she was unable to give any very clear account. She only dimly remembered that through many days of scorching heat and many nights of weary travel she was always piteously pleading for her lost child—always seeming to hear it crying to her to save it from destruction. The long journey ended at last. She was left by the other at the first Christian settlement they

reached, after which, travelling slowly from village to village, she made her way to Yala. Her old neighbours and friends did not know her at first, but when they were at length convinced that it was indeed Marta Riquelme that stood before them she was welcomed like one returned from the grave. I heard of her arrival, and hastening forth to greet her found her seated before a neighbour's house already surrounded by half the people of the village.

Was this woman indeed Marta, once the pride of Yala! It was hard to believe it, so darkened with the burning suns and winds of years was her face, once so fair; so wasted and furrowed with grief and the many hardships she had undergone! Her figure, worn almost to a skeleton, was clothed with ragged garments, while her head, bowed down with sorrow and despair, was divested of that golden crown which had been her chief ornament. Seeing me arrive she cast herself on her knees before me and taking my hands in hers covered it with tears and kisses. The grief I felt at the sight of her forlorn condition mingled with joy for her deliverance from death and captivity overcame me; I was shaken like a reed in the wind, and covering my face with my robe I sobbed aloud in the presence of all the people.

CHAPTER IV

EVERYTHING that charity could dictate was done to alleviate her misery. A merciful woman of Yala received her into her house and provided her with decent garments. But for a time nothing served to raise her desponding spirits; she still grieved for her lost babe, and seemed ever in fancy listening to its piteous cries for help. When assured that Cosme would return in due time, that alone gave her comfort. She believed what they told her, for it agreed with her wish, and by degrees the effects of her terrible experience began to wear off, giving place to a feeling of feverish impatience, with which she looked forward to her husband's return. With this feeling, which I did all I could to encourage, perceiving it to be the only remedy against despair, came also a new anxiety about her personal appearance. She grew careful in her dress, and made the most of her short and sunburnt hair. Beauty she could never recover; but she possessed good features which could not be altered; her eyes also retained their violet colour, and hope brought back to her something of the vanished expression of other years.

At length, when she had been with us over a year, one day there came a report that Cosme had arrived, that he had been seen in Yala, and had alighted at Andrada's

door—the store in the main road. She heard it and rose up with a great cry of joy. He had come to her at last—he would comfort her! She could not wait for his arrival: what wonder! Hurrying forth she flew like the wind through the village, and in a few moments stood on Andrada's threshold, panting from her race, her cheeks glowing, all the hope and life and fire of her girlhood rushing back to her heart. There she beheld Cosme, changed but little, surrounded by his old companions, listening in silence and with a dismayed countenance to the story of Marta's sufferings in the great desert, of her escape and return to Yala, where she had been received like one come back from the sepulchre. Presently they caught sight of her standing there. "Here is Marta herself arrived in good time," they cried. "Behold your wife!"

He shook himself from them with a strange laugh. "What, that woman my wife—Marta Riquelme!" he replied. "No, no, my friends, be not deceived; Marta perished long ago in the desert, where I have been to seek for her. Of her death I have no doubt; let me pass."

He pushed by her, left her standing there motionless as a statue, unable to utter a word, and was quickly on his horse riding away from Yala.

Then suddenly she recovered possession of her faculties, and with a cry of anguish hurried after him, imploring him to return to her; but finding that he would not listen to her she was overcome with despair and fell upon the earth insensible. She was taken up by the people who

had followed her out and carried back into the house. Unhappily she was not dead, and when she recovered consciousness it was pitiful to hear the excuses she invented for the remorseless wretch who had abandoned her. She was altered, she said, greatly altered—it was not strange that Cosme had refused to believe that she could be the Marta of six years ago! In her heart she knew that nobody was deceived: to all Yala it was patent that she had been deserted. She could not endure it, and when she met people in the street she lowered her eyes and passed on, pretending not to see them. Most of her time was spent indoors, and there she would sit for hours without speaking or stirring, her cheeks resting on her hands, her eyes fixed on vacancy. My heart bled for her; morning and evening I remembered her in my prayers; by every argument I sought to cheer her drooping spirit, even telling her that the beauty and freshness of her youth would return to her in time, and that her husband would repent and come back to her.

These efforts were fruitless. Before many days she disappeared from Yala, and though diligent search was made in the adjacent mountains she could not be found. Knowing how empty and desolate her life had been, deprived of every object of affection, I formed the opinion that she had gone back to the desert to seek the tribe where she had been a captive in the hope of once more seeing her lost children. At length, when all expectation of ever seeing her again had been abandoned, a person named Montero came to me with tidings of her. He was a poor man, a charcoal-burner, and lived with his

wife and children in the forest about two hours' journey from Yala, at a distance from any other habitation. Finding Marta wandering lost in the woods he had taken her to his rancho, and she had been pleased to find this shelter, away from the people of Yala who knew her history; and it was at Marta's own request that this good man had ridden to the village to inform me of her safety. I was greatly relieved to hear all this, and thought that Marta had acted wisely in escaping from the villagers, who were always pointing her out and repeating her wonderful history. In that sequestered spot where she had taken refuge, removed from sad associations and gossiping tongues, the wounds in her heart would perhaps gradually heal and peace return to her perturbed spirit.

Before many weeks had elapsed, however, Montero's wife came to me with a very sad account of Marta. She had grown day by day more silent and solitary in her habits, spending most of her time in some secluded spot among the trees, where she would sit motionless, brooding over her memories for hours at a time. Nor was this the worst. Occasionally she would make an effort to assist in the household work, preparing the patay or maize for the supper, or going out with Montero's wife to gather firewood in the forest. But suddenly, in the middle of her task, she would drop her bundle of sticks and, casting herself on the earth, break forth into the most heart-rending cries and lamentations, loudly exclaiming that God had unjustly persecuted her, that He was a being filled with malevolence, and speaking many things against Him very dreadful to hear. Deeply distressed at these

things I called for my mule and accompanied the poor woman back to her own house; but when we arrived there Marta could nowhere be found.

Most willingly would I have remained to see her, and try once more to win her back from these desponding moods, but I was compelled to return to Yala. For it happened that a fever epidemic had recently broken out and spread over the country, so that hardly a day passed without its long journey to perform and death-bed to attend. Often during those days, worn out with fatigue and want of sleep I would dismount from my mule and rest for a season against a rock or tree, wishing for death to come and release me from so sad an existence.

When I left Montero's house I charged him to send me news of Marta as soon as they should find her; but for several days I heard nothing. At length word came that they had discovered her hiding-place in the forest, but could not induce her to leave it, or even to speak to them; and they implored me to go to them, for they were greatly troubled at her state, and knew not what to do.

Once more I went out to seek her; and this was the saddest journey of all, for even the elements were charged with unusual gloom, as if to prepare my mind for some unimaginable calamity. Rain, accompanied by terrific thunder and lightning, had been falling in torrents for several days, so that the country was all but impassable: the swollen streams roared between the hills, dragging down rocks and trees, and threatening, whenever we were compelled to ford them, to carry us away to destruction. The rain had ceased, but the whole sky was covered by

a dark motionless cloud, unpierced by a single ray of sunshine. The mountains, wrapped in blue vapours, loomed before us, vast and desolate; and the trees, in that still, thick atmosphere, were like figures of trees hewn out of solid ink-black rock and set up in some shadowy subterranean region to mock its inhabitants with an imitation of the upper world.

At length we reached Montero's hut, and, followed by all the family, went to look for Marta. The place where she had concealed herself was in a dense wood half a league from the house, and the ascent to it being steep and difficult Montero was compelled to walk before, leading my mule by the bridle. At length we came to the spot where they had discovered her, and there, in the shadow of the woods, we found Marta still in the same place, seated on the trunk of a fallen tree, which was sodden with the rain and half buried under great creepers and masses of dead and rotting foliage. She was in a crouching attitude, her feet gathered under her garments, which were now torn to rags and fouled with clay; her elbows were planted on her drawn-up knees, and her long, bony fingers thrust into her hair, which fell in tangled disorder over her face. To this pitiable condition had she been brought by great and unmerited sufferings.

Seeing her, a cry of compassion escaped my lips, and casting myself off my mule I advanced towards her. As I approached she raised her eyes to mine, and then I stood still, transfixed with amazement and horror at what I saw; for they were no longer those soft violet orbs which had retained until recently their sweet pathetic

expression; now they were round and wild-looking, open to thrice their ordinary size, and filled with a lurid yellow fire, giving them a resemblance to the eyes of some hunted savage animal.

"Great God, she has lost her reason!" I cried; then falling on my knees I disengaged the crucifix from my neck with trembling hands, and endeavoured to hold it up before her sight. This movement appeared to infuriate her; the insane, desolate eyes, from which all human expression had vanished, became like two burning balls, which seemed to shoot out sparks of fire; her short hair rose up until it stood like an immense crest on her head; and suddenly bringing down her skeleton-like hands she thrust the crucifix violently from her, uttering at the same time a succession of moans and cries that pierced my heart with pain to hear. And presently flinging up her arms, she burst forth into shrieks so terrible in the depth of agony they expressed that overcome by the sound I sank upon the earth and hid my face. The others, who were close behind me, did likewise, for no human soul could endure those cries, the remembrance of which, even now after many years, causes the blood to run cold in my veins.

"The Kakué! The Kakué!" exclaimed Montero, who was close behind me.

Recalled to myself by these words I raised my eyes only to discover that Marta was no longer before me. For even in that moment, when those terrible cries were ringing through my heart, waking the echoes of the mountain solitudes, the awful change had come, and she

had looked her last with human eyes on earth and on man! In another form—that strange form of the Kakué—she had fled out of our sight for ever to hide in those gloomy woods which were henceforth to be her dwelling place. And I—most miserable of men, what had I done that all my prayers and strivings had been thus frustrated, that out of my very hands the spirit of the power of darkness had thus been permitted to wrest this unhappy soul from me!

I rose up trembling from the earth, the tears pouring unchecked down my cheeks, while the members of Montero's family gathered round me and clung to my garments. Night closed on us, black as despair and death, and with the greatest difficulty we made our way back through the woods. But I would not remain at the rancho; at the risk of my life I returned to Yala, and all through that dark solitary ride I was incessantly crying out to God to have mercy on me. Towards midnight I reached the village in safety, but the horror with which that unheard of tragedy infected me, the fears and the doubts which dared not yet shape themselves into words, remained in my breast to torture me. For days I could neither eat nor sleep. I was reduced to a skeleton and my hair began to turn white before its time. Being now incapable of performing my duties, and believing that death was approaching, I yearned once more for the city of my birth. I escaped at length from Yala, and with great difficulty reached the town of Jujuy and from thence by slow stages I journeyed back to Cordova.

CHAPTER V

"ONCE more do I behold thee, O Cordova, beautiful to my eyes as the new Jerusalem coming down from Heaven to those who have witnessed the resurrection! Here, where my life began, may I now be allowed to lie down in peace, like a tired child that falls asleep on its mother's breast."

Thus did I apostrophise my natal city, when, looking from the height above, I at last saw it before me, girdled with purple hills and bright with the sunshine, the white towers of the many churches springing out of the green mist of groves and gardens.

Nevertheless Providence ordained that in Cordova I was to find life and not death. Surrounded by old beloved friends, worshipping in the old church I knew so well, health returned to me, and I was like one who rises after a night of evil dreams and goes forth to feel the sunshine and fresh wind on his face. I told the strange story of Marta to one person only; this was Father Irala, a learned and discreet man of great piety, and one high in authority in the church at Cordova. I was astonished that he was able to listen calmly to the things I related; he spoke some consoling words, but made no attempt then or afterwards to throw any light on the mystery. In Cordova a great cloud seemed to be lifted from my mind

which left my faith unimpaired; I was once more cheerful and happy—happier than I had ever been since leaving it. Three months went by; then Irala told me one day that it was time for me to return to Yala, for my health being restored there was nothing to keep me longer from my flock.

Oh that flock, that flock, in which for me there had been only one precious lamb!

I was greatly disquieted; all those nameless doubts and fears which had left me now seemed returning; I begged him to spare me, to send some younger man, ignorant of the matters I had imparted to him, to take my place. He replied that for the very reason that I was acquainted with those matters I was the only fit person to go to Yala. Then in my agitation I unburdened my heart to him. I spoke of that heathenish apathy of the people I had struggled in vain to overcome, of the temptations I had encountered—the passion of anger and earthly love, the impulse to commit some terrible crime. Then had come the tragedy of Marta Riquelme and the spiritual world had seemed to resolve itself into a chaos where Christ was powerless to save; in my misery and despair my reason had almost forsaken me and I had fled from the country. In Cordova hope had revived, my prayers had brought an immediate response, and the Author of salvation seemed to be near to me. Here in Cordova, I said in conclusion, was life, but in the soul-destroying atmosphere of Yala death eternal.

"Brother Sepulvida," he answered, "we know all your sufferings and suffer with you: nevertheless you must

return to Yala. Though there in the enemy's country, in the midst of the fight, when hard pressed and wounded, you have perhaps doubted God's omnipotence, He calls you to the front again, where He will be with you and fight at your side. It is for you, not for us, to find the solution of those mysteries which have troubled you; and that you have already come near to the solution your own words seem to show. Remember that we are here not for our own pleasure, but to do our Master's work; that the highest reward will not be for those who sit in the cool shade, book in hand, but for the toilers in the field who are suffering the burden and heat of the day. Return to Yala and be of good heart, and in due time all things will be made clear to your understanding."

These words gave me some comfort, and meditating much on them I took my departure from Cordova, and in due time arrived at my destination.

I had, on quitting Yala, forbidden Montero and his wife to speak of the manner of Marta's disappearance, believing that it would be better for my people to remain in ignorance of such a matter; but now, when going about in the village, on my return I found that it was known to everyone. That "Marta had become a Kakué" was mentioned on all sides; yet it did not affect them with astonishment and dismay that this should be so, it was merely an event for idle women to chatter about, like Quiteria's elopement or Maxima's quarrel with her mother-in-law.

It was now the hottest season of the year, when it was impossible to be very active, or much out of doors. During those days the feeling of despondence began again to

weigh heavily on my heart. I pondered on Irala's words, and prayed continually, but the illumination he had prophesied came not. When I preached, my voice was like the buzzing of summer flies to the people : they came and sat or knelt on the floor of the church, and heard me with stolid unmoved countenances, then went forth again unchanged in heart. After the morning Mass I would return to my house, and, sitting alone in my room, pass the sultry hours, immersed in melancholy thoughts, having no inclination to work. At such times the image of Marta, in all the beauty of her girlhood, crowned with her shining golden hair, would rise before me, until the tears gathering in my eyes would trickle through my fingers. Then too I often recalled that terrible scene in the wood—the crouching figure in its sordid rags, the glaring furious eyes —again those piercing shrieks seemed to ring through me, and fill the dark mountain's forest with echoes, and I would start up half maddened with the sensations of horror renewed within me.

And one day, while sitting in my room, with these memories only for company, all at once a voice in my soul told me that the end was approaching, that the crisis was come, and that to whichever side I fell, there I should remain through all eternity. I rose up from my seat staring straight before me, like one who sees an assassin enter his apartment dagger in hand and who nerves himself for the coming struggle. Instantly all my doubts, my fears, my unshapen thoughts found expression, and with a million tongues shrieked out in my soul against my Redeemer. I called aloud on Him to save me, but He

came not; and the spirits of darkness, enraged at my long resistance, had violently seized on my soul, and were dragging it down to perdition. I reached forth my hands and took hold of the crucifix standing near me, and clung to it as a drowning mariner does to a floating spar. "Cast it down!" cried out a hundred devils in my ear. "Trample under foot this symbol of a slavery which has darkened your life and made earth a hell! He that died on the Cross is powerless now; miserably do they perish who put their trust in Him! Remember Marta Riquelme, and save yourself from her fate while there is time."

My hands relaxed their hold on the cross, and falling on the stones, I cried aloud to the Lord to slay me and take my soul, for by death only could I escape from that great crime my enemies were urging me to commit.

Scarcely had I pronounced these words before I felt that the fiends had left me, like ravening wolves scared from their quarry. I rose up and washed the blood from my bruised forehead, and praised God; for now there was a great calm in my heart, and I knew that He who died to save the world was with me, and that His grace had enabled me to conquer and deliver my own soul from perdition.

From that time I began to see the meaning of Irala's words, that it was for me and not for him to find the solution of the mysteries which had troubled me, and that I had already come near to finding it. I also saw the reason of that sullen resistance to religion in the minds of the people of Yala; of the temptations which had assailed me—the strange tempests of anger and the

carnal passions, never experienced elsewhere, and which had blown upon my heart like hot blighting winds; and even of all the events of Marta Riquelme's tragic life; for all these things had been ordered with devilish cunning to drive my soul into rebellion. I no longer dwelt persistently on that isolated event of her transformation, for now the whole action of that tremendous warfare in which the powers of darkness are arrayed against the messengers of the Gospel began to unfold itself before me.

In thought I went back to the time, centuries ago, when as yet not one ray of heavenly light had fallen upon this continent; when men bowed down in worship to gods, which they called in their several languages Pachacamac, Viracocho, and many others; names which being translated mean, The All-powerful, Ruler of Men, The Strong Comer, Lord of the Dead, The Avenger. These were not mythical beings; they were mighty spiritual entities, differing from each other in character, some taking delight in wars and destruction, while others regarded their human worshippers with tolerant and even kindly feelings. And because of this belief in powerful benevolent beings some learned Christian writers have held that the aborigines possessed a knowledge of the true God, albeit obscured by many false notions. This is a manifest error; for if in the material world light and darkness cannot mingle, much less can the Supreme Ruler stoop to share His sovereignty with Belial and Moloch, or in this continent, with Tupa and Viracocho: but all these demons, great and small, and known by various names, were angels of darkness who had divided amongst themselves this new

world and the nations dwelling in it. Nor need we be astonished at finding here resemblance to the true religion —majestic and graceful touches suggesting the Divine Artist; for Satan himself is clothed as an angel of light, and scruples not to borrow the things invented by the Divine Intelligence. These spirits possessed unlimited power and authority; their service was the one great business of all men's lives; individual character and natural feelings were crushed out by an implacable despotism, and no person dreamed of disobedience to their decrees, interpreted by their high priests; but all men were engaged in raising colossal temples, enriched with gold and precious stones, to their honour, and priests and virgins in tens of thousands conducted their worship with a pomp and magnificence surpassing those of ancient Egypt or Babylon. Nor can we doubt that these beings often made use of their power to suspend the order of nature, transforming men into birds and beasts, causing the trembling of the earth which ruins whole cities, and performing many other stupendous miracles to demonstrate their authority or satisfy their malignant natures. The time came when it pleased the Ruler of the world to overthrow this evil empire, using for that end the ancient, feeble instruments despised of men, the missionary priests, and chiefly those of the often persecuted Brotherhood founded by Loyola, whose zeal and holiness have always been an offence to the proud and carnal-minded. Country after country, tribe after tribe, the old gods were deprived of their kingdom, fighting always with all their weapons to keep back the tide of conquest. And at

length, defeated at all points, and like an army fighting in defence of its territory, and gradually retiring before the invader to concentrate itself in some apparently inaccessible region and there stubbornly resist to the end; so have all the old gods and demons retired into this secluded country, where, if they cannot keep out the seeds of truth they have at least succeeded in rendering the soil it falls upon barren as stone. Nor does it seem altogether strange that these once potent beings should be satisfied to remain in comparative obscurity and inaction when the entire globe is open to them, offering fields worthy of their evil ambition. For great as their power and intelligence must be they are, nevertheless, infinite beings, possessing, like man, individual characteristics, capabilities and limitations; and after reigning where they have lost a continent, they may possibly be unfit or unwilling to serve elsewhere. For we know that even in the strong places of Christianity there are spirits enough for the evil work of leading men astray; whole nations are given up to damnable heresies, and all religion is trodden under foot by many whose portion will be where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

From the moment of my last struggle, when this revelation began to dawn upon my mind, I have been safe from their persecutions. No angry passions, no sinful notions, no doubts and despondence disturb the peace of my soul. I was filled with fresh zeal, and in the pulpit felt that it was not my voice, but the voice of some mighty spirit speaking with my lips and preaching to the people with an eloquence of which I was not capable. So far, however,

it has been powerless to win their souls. The old gods, although no longer worshipped openly, are their gods still, and could a new Tupac Amaru arise to pluck down the symbols of Christianity, and proclaim once more the Empire of the Sun, men would everywhere bow down to worship his rising beams and joyfully rebuild temples to the Lightning and the Rainbow.

Although the lost spirits cannot harm they are always near me, watching all my movements, ever striving to frustrate my designs. Nor am I unmindful of their presence. Even here, sitting in my study and looking out on the mountains, rising like stupendous stairs towards heaven and losing their summits in the gathering clouds, I seem to discern the awful shadowy form of Pachacamac, supreme among the old gods. Though his temples are in ruins, where the Pharaohs of the Andes and their millions of slaves worshipped him for a thousand years, he is awful still in his majesty and wrath that plays like lightning on his furrowed brows, kindling his stern countenance, and the beard which rolls downward like an immense white cloud to his knees. Around him gather other tremendous forms in their cloudy vestments—The Strong-Comer, the Lord of the Dead, The Avenger, The Ruler of Men, and many others whose names were once mighty throughout the continent. They have met to take counsel together; I hear their voices in the thunder hoarsely rolling from the hills, and in the wind stirring the forest before the coming tempest. Their faces are towards me, they are pointing to me with their cloudy hands, they are speaking of me—even of me, an old, feeble, worn-out man! But I do not

quail before them; my soul is firm though my flesh is weak; though my knees tremble while I gaze, I dare look forward even to win another victory over them before I depart.

Day and night I pray for that soul still wandering lost in the great wilderness; and no voice rebukes my hope or tells me that my prayer is unlawful. I strain my eyes gazing out towards the forest; but I know not whether Marta Riquelme will return to me with the tidings of her salvation in a dream of the night, or clothed in the garments of the flesh, in the full light of day. For her salvation I wait, and when I have seen it I shall be ready to depart; for as the traveller, whose lips are baked with hot winds, and who thirsts for a cooling draught and swallows sand, strains his eyeballs to see the end of his journey in some great desert, so do I look forward to the goal of this life, when I shall go to Thee, O my Master, and be at rest!

APPENDIX TO EL OMBÚ

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The English Invasion and the Game of El Pato

I MUST say at once that El Ombú is mostly a true story, although the events did not occur exactly in the order given. The incident relating to the English invasion of June and July, 1807, is told pretty much as I had it from the old gaucho called Nicandro in the narrative. That was in the 'sixties. The undated notes which I made of my talks with the old man, containing numerous anecdotes of Santos Ugarte and the whole history of El Ombú, were written, I think, in 1868—the year of the great dust storm. These ancient notes are now before me, and look very strange, both as to the writing and the quality of the paper; also as to the dirtiness of the same, which makes me think that the old manuscript must have been out in that memorable storm, which, I remember, ended with rain—the rain coming down as liquid mud.

There were other old men living in that part of the country who, as boys, had witnessed the march of an English army on Buenos Ayres, and one of these confirmed the story of the blankets thrown away by the army, and of the chaff between some of the British soldiers and the natives.

I confess I had some doubts as to the truth of this

blanket story when I came to read over my old notes; but in referring to the proceedings of the court-martial on Lieutenant-General Whitelocke, published in London in 1808, I find that the incident is referred to. On page 57 of the first volume occurs the following statement, made by General Gower in his evidence. "The men, particularly of Brigadier-General Lumley's brigade, were very much exhausted, and Lieutenant-General Whitelocke, to give them a chance of getting on with tolerable rapidity, ordered all the blankets of the army to be thrown down."

There is nothing, however, in the evidence about the blankets having been used to make a firmer bottom for the army to cross a river, nor is the name of the river mentioned.

Another point in the old gaucho's story may strike the English reader as very strange and almost incredible; this is, that within a very few miles of the army of the hated foreign invader, during its march on the capital, where the greatest excitement prevailed and every preparation for defence was being made, a large number of men were amusing themselves at the game of El Pato. To those who are acquainted with the character of the gaucho there is nothing incredible in such a fact; for the gaucho is, or was, absolutely devoid of the sentiment of patriotism, and regarded all rulers, all in authority from the highest to the lowest, as his chief enemies, and the worst kind of robbers, since they robbed him not only of his goods but of his liberty.

It mattered not to him whether his country paid tribute

to Spain or to England, whether a man appointed by someone at a distance as Governor or Viceroy had black or blue eyes. It was seen that when the Spanish dominion came to an end his hatred was transferred to the ruling cliques of a so-called Republic. When the gauchos attached themselves to Rosas, and assisted him to climb into power, they were under the delusion that he was one of themselves, and would give them that perfect liberty to live their own lives in their own way, which is their only desire. They found out their mistake when it was too late.

It was Rosas who abolished the game of El Pato, but before saying more on that point it would be best to describe the game. I have never seen an account of it in print, but for a very long period, and down to probably about 1840, it was the most popular outdoor game on the Argentine pampas. Doubtless it originated there; it was certainly admirably suited to the habits and disposition of the horsemen of the plains; and unlike most outdoor games it retained its original simple, rude character to the end.

Pato means duck; and to play the game a duck or fowl, or, as was usually the case, some larger domestic bird —turkey, gosling, or muscovy duck—was killed and sewn up in a piece of stout raw hide, forming a somewhat shapeless ball, twice as big as a football, and provided with four loops or handles of strong twisted raw hide made of a convenient size to be grasped by a man's hand. A great point was to have the ball and handles so strongly made that three or four powerful men could take hold and tug

until they dragged each other to the ground without anything giving way.

Whenever it was resolved at any place to have a game, and someone had offered to provide the bird, and the meeting place had been settled, notice would be sent round among the neighbours; and at the appointed time all the men and youths living within a circle of several leagues would appear on the spot, mounted on their best horses. On the appearance of the man on the ground carrying the duck the others would give chase; and by-and-by he would be overtaken, and the ball wrested from his hand; the victor in his turn would be pursued, and when overtaken there would perhaps be a scuffle or scrimmage, as in football, only the strugglers would be first on horseback before dragging each other to the earth. Occasionally when this happened a couple of hot-headed players, angry at being hurt or worsted, would draw their weapons against each other in order to find who was in the right, or to prove which was the better man. But fight or no fight, someone would get the duck and carry it away to be chased again. Leagues of ground would be gone over by the players in this way, and at last some one, luckier or better mounted than his fellows, would get the duck and successfully run the gauntlet of the people scattered about on the plain, and make good his escape. He was the victor, and it was his right to carry the bird home and have it for his dinner. This was, however, a mere fiction; the man who carried off the duck made for the nearest house, followed by all the others, and there not only the duck was cooked, but a vast amount of meat to feed the

whole of the players. While the dinner was in preparation, messengers would be despatched to neighbouring houses to invite the women; and on their arrival dancing would be started and kept up all night.

To the gauchos of the great plains, who took to the back of a horse from childhood, almost as spontaneously as a parasite to the animal on which it feeds, the pato was the game of games, and in their country as much as cricket and football and golf together to the inhabitants of this island. Nor could there have been any better game for men whose existence, or whose success in life, depended so much on their horsemanship; and whose chief glory it was to be able to stick on under difficulties, and, when sticking on was impossible, to fall off gracefully and like a cat, on their feet. To this game the people of the pampa were devoted up to a time when it came into the head of a President of the Republic to have no more of it, and with a stroke of the pen it was abolished for ever.

It would take a strong man in this country to put down any outdoor game to which the people are attached; and he was assuredly a very strong man who did away with El Pato in that land. If any other man who has occupied the position of head of the State at any time during the last ninety years had attempted such a thing, a universal shout of derision would have been the result, and wherever such an absurd decree had appeared pasted up on the walls and doors of churches, shops, and other public places, the gauchos would have been seen filling their mouths with water to squirt it over the despised paper. But this man was more than a president; he was that

Rosas, called by his enemies the "Nero of America." Though by birth a member of a distinguished family, he was by predilection a gaucho, and early in life took to the semi-barbarous life of the plains. Among his fellows Rosas distinguished himself as a dare-devil, one who was not afraid to throw himself from the back of his own horse on to that of a wild horse in the midst of a flying herd into which he had charged. He had all the gaucho's native ferocity, his fierce hates and prejudices; and it was in fact his intimate knowledge of the people he lived with, his oneness in mind with them, that gave him his wonderful influence over them, and enabled him to carry out his ambitious schemes. But why, when he had succeeded in making himself all-powerful by means of their help, when he owed them so much, and the ties uniting him to them were so close, did he deprive them of their beloved pastime? The reason, which will sound almost ridiculous after what I have said of the man's character, was that he considered the game too rough. It is true that it had (for him) its advantages, since it made the men of the plains hardy, daring, resourceful fighters on horseback—the kind of men he most needed for his wars; on the other hand, it caused so much injury to the players, and resulted in so many bloody fights and fierce feuds between neighbours that he considered he lost more than he gained by it.

There were not men enough in the country for his wants; even boys of twelve and fourteen were sometimes torn from the arms of their weeping mothers to be made soldiers of; he could not afford to have full-grown strong

men injuring and killing each other for their own amusement. They must, like good citizens, sacrifice their pleasure for their country's sake. And at length, when his twenty years' reign was over, when people were again free to follow their own inclinations without fear of bullet and cold steel—it was generally cold steel in those days—those who had previously played the game had had roughness enough in their lives, and now only wanted rest and ease; while the young men and youths who had not taken part in El Pato nor seen it played, had never come under its fascination, and had no wish to see it revived.